VIOLENCE AND DISAVOWAL IN VICTORIAN NARRATIVE

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation demonstrates the Victorian novel's preoccupation with what it understands as liberal society's disavowed reliance on arbitrary and often violent decisions as a means of overcoming political and moral incommensurability, or, in other words, what Carl Schmitt has rather infamously called the "exception." Precisely opposed to Schmitt's concept of the sovereign decision is the position of procedural liberalism, in which abstract and objective concepts of right arrived at through deliberative procedures are understood to motivate legal processes that induce justice. Because the absolutist commitment to the sovereign decision is precisely antithetical to liberal ideals, the decision must either be deferred—only to begin a chain of deferrals—or, once implemented, its use must be disavowed. Novels from Thackeray to Conrad all recognize, I argue, the existence of what I call the "crypto-decisionism" obscured by the rhetoric and operations of procedural liberalism.

Victorian demands of propriety and public morality, I argue, require the collective disavowal of whatever is antithetical to publicity. My focus then is on the way that the Victorian novel self-consciously reproduces the relationship between violence and disavowal that it portrays as essential to social harmony within the liberal context. The novels I consider in this dissertation present worlds in which the essential role of violence to preserving community stability is known but not acknowledged precisely because any open acknowledgement of the role of violence in maintaining social equanimity at the same time threatens to destroy the equanimity it secures. Ultimately the contradiction between

deliberative procedures meant to produce consensual action on the one hand, and the violent decision on the other hand, creates a tension, I argue, that shapes the narrative structures of the novel in its image. In the novels I examine narrative conflict takes the form of incongruities or disturbances against which the novel must marshal exceptional means—a sort of internal, aesthetic decisionism—in order to secure aesthetic coherence or closure. In this way the novel form, I contend, mimetically reproduces Victorian anxieties regarding liberal forms of individual and community self-understanding.

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PREFACE

This dissertation examines the interdependence of violence and liberal forms of individual and community self-understanding as presented in nineteenth-century narrative. I focus chiefly on three major writers of the latter half of the century: George Eliot, Thomas Hardy, and Joseph Conrad. I argue that the novels of these writers (among others) self-consciously expose liberal society's reliance on what Carl Schmitt described as the "exception" (*Political Theology* 5-15). In other words, procedural liberalism depends finally on an arbitrary and often violent decision in an effort to resolve the conflicts inherent to political community, or what George Eliot referred to as the "antagonism of valid claims" (*Critical Writings* 246). The use of arbitrary violence to forcibly resolve conflict represents an essential contradiction of liberal process because, at least since John Locke, liberalism has been fundamentally committed to the triumph of right over might. In fact, one might argue that the need to overcome a politics of the exception provides liberalism with its very reason for being.[1] That an abstract and objective concept of right arrived at through deliberative procedures can motivate legal processes, and in so doing induce justice, is a central tenet of liberal democratic ideals, and opposes precisely the absolutist commitment to the sovereign decision. For this reason the decision must either be deferred—only to begin a chain of deferrals, a common critique of parliamentary operations—or, once implemented, must be disavowed both in theory and in practice. In the same way that Pierre Bourdieu describes a

[1] It is not difficult to see that Schmitt's vision of the political, in which "the state suspends the law in the exception on the basis of its right of self-preservation," is precisely antithetical to procedural liberalism (*Political Theology* 12).

"disavowal of the usual forms of interest" as that which enables certain synergies and relationships to flourish within the field of cultural production ("The Production of Belief" 265), one could say that in the case of procedural liberalism it is similalry the disavowal of the usual forms of resolution—in other words, the arbitrary decision—that allows for the continued operation of procedures of legitimation. The contradiction between deliberative procedures meant to produce consensual action on the one hand, and the violent decision on the other hand, creates a tension immanent to the novels I consider in this dissertation, and which tends to shape the narrative structures of these novels in its image.

That the realist novel is generally allied with liberal aspirations of objectivity and that the formal operations of the realist novel reproduce procedures of consensus formation has become accepted from a number of divergent, and even opposed critical perspectives. Thus it comes as no surprise that recent work in Victorian Studies has turned specifically to the Victorian novel in an effort to recuperate ideals of liberalism and cosmopolitanism for the twenty first century. Committed to a Habermasian critique of poststructuralism, the work of these scholars revaluates Victorian literature in the wake of the very influential tradition of criticism inspired by Foucault and Althusser, which understands nineteenth-century narrative as a disciplinary force engaged in various ways in the formation of the liberal subject. My work wends a way between these two dominant discourses. I engage on the one hand with the violent discontinuities of the Victorian novel, which I feel the newer, neoliberal forms of criticism tend to ignore, and on the other hand show that texts often understood to unconsciously participate in disciplinary procedures are instead well aware of the troubling techniques they depict. In short, I argue that texts envisioned—for various reasons—as exemplary of an idealized Victorian liberal discourse, instead expose the violence these books understand as sustaining liberal ideals.

I am aware that the meaning of the term liberalism (like so many "-isms") is difficult to pin down, so I wish at the outset to clarify my use of the term. By liberalism I do not intend any specifically partisan description of political systems or ideologies (either as the term pertains to the nineteenth century or to our current political discourse), but unless otherwise noted, allude instead to those forms of parliamentary or democratic political culture that have dominated political organization in the West since the nineteenth century. Yet liberalism as an idea is ambiguous not only because divergent and often vague usages of the term have over time cultivated discrepancies in meaning (they certainly have). The meaning of the term is equivocal because as a modality of both individual and collective self-understanding liberalism itself enfolds conflicting and ambiguous intellectual and agential impulses that emerge as practical contradictions. That said, I agree with Lauren M. E. Goodlad that, broadly stated, liberalism in the nineteenth century represented a social, political and intellectual movement in which "centralized institutions and statist interventions were curbed to preserve the 'self-governing' liberties of individuals and local communities" (viii).[2] Still, there is a significant tension between Victorian liberalism's commitment to individualism and its devotion to an ameliorative, progressive culture. Despite what we in hindsight consider to be the sacrosanct importance of *laissez-faire* to liberalism, there exists "a positive impulse to build character and promote social betterment by collective means [that] permeates [the] diverse liberal thought" of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Goodlad viii). In Victorian England, one needed not profess political

[2] Goodlad goes on to argue in *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* that, while "in hindsight Victorian liberalism is best characterized by its pervasive tensions and paradoxes, it is also important to stress the remarkably durable liberal mythology—the ideals, vocabulary, and assumptions—to which contemporaries consciously and unconsciously subscribed" (viii).

liberalism in order to still be liberal in one's actions and understandings.[3] In this sense, the Victorian novel is to some extent always already a liberal novel.

Yet, while many Victorian novels, like the populace they depict, appear committed to ideals that we might broadly identify as liberal, the novels of the period also demonstrate a distinct unease with liberalism as a practice. The novels of Charles Dickens, for instance, are famous for their critique of the indecision ensconced in parliamentary bureaucracy and the "perennially hopeless" legal procedures of chancery (*Bleak House* 52). At the same time, countless Victorian novels—one might think here of George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859), Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), or Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1871)—are punctuated by scapegoating, transportations, or executions. All are forms *par excellence* of the violent decision. Indeed the problems of closure these novels exhibit, in other words, their evident need for exceptional means to force aesthetic resolution, is one apparent expression of the very problem I mean to explore in this work. The late nineteenth-century novels I examine in this dissertation generally emphasize the relation between liberal intransigence, that is, the inability or undesirability of reaching a decision at both the collective and individual levels, and decisive acts of violence or exclusion. Violence is required for the maintenance of liberal equanimity, but because that violence is antithetical to liberal self-understanding, it must simultaneously be disavowed so as not to jeopardize that equanimity. Publicity and the social force of propriety are important concerns for any discussion of Victorian, or liberal, modes of agency and self-understanding; the all important Victorian concept of character is, after all, principally a public construct requiring at least the pretense of shared understanding. For this reason the maintenance of propriety also required disavowal. The novels I explore in the pages to follow all portray violence as an evident but

[3] See Goodlad, ix. Also, see Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists*.

unacknowledged fact of the worlds they present.

Victorian narrative, I argue, acknowledges the synergy between social cohesion and disavowed violence and thus in various ways consciously reproduces this fraught relationship as a component of its formal procedures. Thus, my introductory chapter begins with a discussion of public privacy in the novel and argues that the Victorian novel understands disavowal, due to the demands of publicity and public agency, to be an essential component of liberal agency. Through readings of William H. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1849) and Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850) and *Little Dorrit* (1855), I show how public privacy is expressed as an element of style in the novel and how Dickens in particular links the modern phenomenon of disavowal specifically to violence. Over the course of the chapter, I attempt to position historically the problem of violence in nineteenth-century liberal culture as well as take stock of the critical stakes of my engagement with the Victorian novel. I pay special attention here to the recent discourses of cultivation and detachment that have in some sense redirected the course of Victorian Studies over the last two decades. I also show why my exploration of violence and decisionism in the Victorian novel has brought me necessarily to the controversial political and legal thought of Carl Schmitt, and in this chapter I discuss his critique of liberal democracy and his theory of sovereignty. Over the course of this dissertation, I attempt to show that the Victorian authors with whom I am concerned here were beginning to understand the potential flaws of liberal democracy some fifty or sixty years before Schmitt delivered his trenchant critique of parliamentary democracy. However my efforts are not meant to be merely comparative; instead I attempt to demonstrate that the tensions between decision and indecision, violence and disavowal make an impact on the formal procedures of the novel. Because these writers lacked the philosophical language supplied some years later by Carl Schmitt, they expressed their

insights in the form of narrative art, often articulating conflict through the employment of divergent generic idioms. Consequently my next chapter argues that the legal processes Eliot depicts in *Adam Bede* (1859) rely on exclusionary practices that are ultimately disclaimed by the community in whose name they occur. In *Adam Bede* Eliot emphasizes the deliberative character of collectivized and procedurally legitimized violence and demonstrates that, in the same way that the novel itself depends on the violence of scapegoating to reach a formal resolution, liberal procedure depends on what I call crypto-decisionism to surmount the conflicts by which it is presented. I go on to demonstrate that in her later novels, such as *Middlemarch* (1871) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876), Eliot strains unsuccessfully to resolve the necessity of violence by fashioning in her novels realities of meaningful compromise.

My third chapter focuses on the novels of Thomas Hardy, and in particular on *The Return of the Native* (1878) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Contrary to the progressive narratives of Eliot's later novels, Hardy's narrative strategies teach us that the liberal impulse functions by precisely those methods—violence and exclusion—that liberalism must denounce as irrational in its effort to maintain the identity of its political practices and human reason. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for instance, I argue that the narrator's urgent repudiation of Tess's fear of the violent world she inhabits corresponds to liberalism's rationalizing strategy of disavowal. Hardy's novels suggest that the impulse towards universalism disturbs the progressive sequence it hopes to secure; rather than achieving a universal right, the cosmopolitan impulse only broadens the field of divergent interests. Instead of inducing affiliation, then, liberal cosmopolitanism thins, so to speak, human connection and identity and tends to proliferate domains of struggle and conflict. Hardy's novels demonstrate that as society becomes what Schmitt calls "depoliticized," violence and

conflict become endemic to social relations: "in the new [depoliticized] domain, at first considered neutral, the antitheses of men and interests unfold with a new intensity and become increasingly sharper" (*Concept of the Political* 90). So on both the cognitive and physical levels, for Hardy, the impulse toward universalization leads not to inclusion, but to the breakdown of affiliations and consequently the generalization of violence in liberal society.

The next chapter examines Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), which, set in late Victorian London, I argue intentionally conjures the aesthetic of Victorian narrative in an effort to explore the violence of a degraded culture in which human agency depends on secrecy and disavowal or, in the words of Winnie Verloc, an approach that "consists of not taking notice of the inside of facts (*The Secret Agent* 109). Like Hardy before him, Conrad presents the democratic and cosmopolitan impulses as leading to regimes of individual and collective self-understanding that are characterized by mistrust, secret calculation, and above all, indecision. *The Secret Agent*—a novel about various forms of anarchy—ultimately conflates liberal democracy and anarchy, and in this way reproduces in precise terms Schmitt's critique of liberal society. At the same time, through the twinned plots of foreign ambassador Mr. Vladimir and the anarchist Professor, Conrad parodies the concept of the violent exception, which each of these characters wants to use to create a state of emergency and induce reciprocal violence—and limitations on individual liberties—from society at large. Ultimately Conrad's novel critiques the theological underpinnings of the various political orientations it portrays and finally shows that instrumental violence inheres in the politically neutralized concept of humanity. We find, however, that Conrad's democratically applied irony is finally incommensurate with Winnie's violently decisive response to her world, an action that in many ways reprises Hardy's representation of Tess's final, atavistic

violence against Alec D'Urberville. In this way *The Secret Agent*, like *Tess*, exposes the intensely violent core that it understands as the disavowed truth of liberal culture. A brief conclusion consists of a more global reflection on how disavowal and (in)decision effect the form of the novel and attempts to take stock of the ways in which the relationship between violence and disavowal remains pertinent to the novel, and liberal culture, long after the historical period on which this dissertation had focused.

This dissertation would never have been completed without the professional and intellectual guidance of many members of the University of Utah Department of English, to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. Chief among these stewards have been Vincent P. Pecora and Anne Jamison, who in their very different ways have for nearly a decade now generously provided intellectual counsel as well as moral support. Thank you, Vince, for finding enough promise in my work—even when I could not—to keep me moving ever onward. And thanks to you, Anne, for balancing so effortlessly the roles of mentor and friend—and for always being the right one at always just the right time. I am grateful to Matthew Potolsky for generous and thoughtful discussions, for his professional insights, and for his always dependable honesty. Also, many thanks to Stacey Margolis, who, never afraid to get right to the heart of the matter, has been a great help to me throughout the course of my studies. Your discerning reading has been instrumental to my writing, and your willingness to take the time to share your professional experience with me has also been immensely important to my understanding of the academic profession. I would also like to extend my gratitude to Joesph Metz, not only for fulfilling his role on my committee in such a rigorous, thoughtful, and congenial way, but also for so clearly being precisely the kind of professional intellectual and teacher that I could only aspire to be. I also want to thank Scott Black, Andy Franta, and Barry Weller for their various forms of assistance along the way. And especially

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VIOLENCE AND DISAVOWAL IN VICTORIAN NARRATIVE

> "That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How I suffered it is, I have said already, beyond my power to tell" –Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield*

About a third of the way through Charles Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), David, now a young man, encounters his old school mate Steerforth, who insists that David travel with him to his family home. After becoming acquainted with Mrs. Steerforth, an "elderly," female version of Steerforth himself, and in a somewhat protracted manner also with the furnishings of the "genteel old-fashioned house," we suddenly discover there to be a "second lady in the dining-room" (300-301). Though the woman "was not agreeable to look at," due to some peculiarities, she nonetheless "attracted [David's] attention" (301). This unwonted attraction, David speculates, is due to "something really remarkable in her":

> It was an old scar—I should rather call it seam, for it was not discolored, and had healed years ago—which had cut through her mouth, downward towards the chin, but was now barely visible across the table, except above and on her upper lip, the shape of which it had altered. (301)

This woman is of course Rosa Dartle, the spurned past exploit of James Steerforth. The scar that so transfixes David, we find, is the trace of Steerforth's past violence:

> 'What a remarkable scar that is upon her lip' [David] said. Steerforth's face fell, and he paused for a moment.
> 'Why, the fact is,' he returned, '—I did that.'
> 'By an unfortunate accident!'
> 'No. I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her. A promising young angel I must have been!' […]
> 'And I have no doubt she loves you like a brother?' said [David]. (301)

Rosa Dartle's scar *is* remarkable, as David points out, and not least due to the manner in which the mark across Rosa's lips powerfully syncretizes violence, sexuality, and writing, and in this way proleptically charges the remainder of *David Copperfield*. Given David's position as narrator and author of a narrative that is itself recanted (the original subtitle to the novel described itself parenthetically as a *Personal History* its author *Never Meant to be Published On Any Account*), it is perhaps odd that, for much of this chapter, David takes the role of proxy reader. Nonetheless, "like old writing on the wall," Rosa's scar divulges the history of Steerforth's violence, and in doing so provokes a "painful interest" in David (302). Curiously, however, once David discovers the disclaimed truth of Steerforth's past violent actions, he obscures their unsettling significance (reproducing a narrative strategy with which the reader has by now become familiar) by twice offering alternative and ameliorative readings of the narrative Steerforth reveals in response to his query.[1]

David is initiated covertly (as if he needed any coaching) into a kind of silent covenant: all present—including, now, David—know well the truth of Rosa's disfigurement, and thus the truth of Steerforth's character, yet choose corporately not to acknowledge these truths. Once remarked upon, and the history of Rosa's scar divulged, the mark becomes literally un-remarkable, which is to say, discursively off-limits. Rosa's scar represents what is well known, present for all to see, but as if by silent accord, that which cannot be acknowledged. Rosa's scar is a precise figure of disavowal, a public form of privacy that not

[1] I'm thinking here of those moments of narrative reticence and cagy silence that mark as well as mask, for example, the early school relations of David and Steerforth, David's time at the bottle washing factory, and then his repression of the violence he experiences at the hands of Mr. Murdstone. These foundational moments—both to David's life as well as to the form of his narrative—disavowed as they are, nonetheless exert an intense pressure on the remainder of the narrative, and are crucial, I think, to the argument that Dickens's book is making about the role that disavowed violence plays in liberal society and in the formation for the liberal subject.

only characterizes the narrative operations of *David Copperfield*, but that I will argue in this dissertation also describes a more general tendency in Victorian narrative. The novel shows that Victorian demands of propriety and public morality require the collective disavowal of whatever is antithetical to publicity. My specific focus will be the ways that the Victorian novel is preoccupied with, and thus knowingly reproduces the relationship between violence and disavowal that it recognizes as essential in the liberal context. It is not so much that the individual hides certain private impulses or that the individual is prone to violent actions, but rather that violence is at once essential and antithetical to the liberal democratic society that must repudiate it. Violence is thus both public, because apparent, and private because open acknowledgement of the role of violence in maintaining social equanimity threatens to destroy that equanimity. In a recent book on the subject, Michael Taussig describes "public secrecy," or in other words "*knowing what not to know*," as the "most important [type] of social knowledge (1-2 Taussig's emphasis). Intriguingly, Taussig explicitly connects the phenomena of the public secret to "defacement":

> When the human body, a nation's flag, money, or a public statue is *defaced*, a strange surplus of negative energy is likely to be aroused from within the defaced thing itself. It is now in a state of *desecration*, the closest many of us are going to get to the sacred in the modern world. [Any effort toward the] characterization of defacement can never confront its object head-on, if only because defacement catches us unawares and can only be known unexpectedly, complicit with the violence of daily life. The shortest way between two points, between violence and its analysis, is the long way around, tracing the edge sideways like the crab scuttling. (Taussig 1-2)

Installing the undeniable symbol of a woman's violently "cut" genitalia on her face, for all to see, as it were, may not be what most of us think of as taking "the long way around" the subject at hand, yet this is in fact exactly what Dickens does in *David Copperfield*. He confronts the reader precisely, violently, with what cannot be confronted. This confrontation induces the reader, through the play of presence and absence, to contend with and to attempt to characterize, if only obliquely, that which is defaced. In the same way that

Dickens exposes the reader to the fact of Rosa's violation, so more generally do his and other novels of the period challenge the reader by divulging another secret, that of liberalism's desecration by its own internalized violence. Liberalism's sacred tenet is that through openness and deliberation right will triumph over might, and that because formalized procedures are able to arrive at consensual action, society no longer requires the arbitrary decision, or coercive violence, in order to resolve the conflicts deriving from ideological incommensurability. Yet as I will show in the pages that follow, the Victorian novel regularly shows these sacred ideals to be disfigured by an essential violence that is known, but not acknowledged.

Taussig never explicitly links with irony the "surplus of negative energy" he says emanates from the defaced object or thing; he says, however, that "defacement works on objects the way jokes work on language, bringing out their inherent magic nowhere more so than when those objects have become routinized and social" (Taussig 5). Yet certainly the "magic" of negative energy describes the function of irony, of bringing into being what is there but not there, of defacing stable meanings and writings with doubts and doubleness, and doing so in an effort to release from them "surplus" significations. For if Rosa's scar suggests the function of disavowal in Victorian narrative, then Rosa's speech in *David Copperfield* represents Dickens's recognition of the discursive processes for which this figure is associated in the novel: Rosa "never said anything she wanted to say, outright; but hinted it, and made a great deal more of it by this practice" (301).

> For example, when Mrs. Steerforth observed, more in jest than in earnest, that she feared her son led but a wild life at college, Miss Dartle put in thus:
> 'Oh, really? You know how ignorant I am, and that I only ask for information, but isn't it always so? I thought that kind of life was on all hands understood to be—eh?'
> 'It is education for a very grave profession, if you mean that, Rosa,' Mrs. Steerforth answered with some coldness.
> 'Oh! Yes! That's very true,' returned Miss Dartle. 'But isn't it, though?—I want to be put right if I am wrong—isn't it really?'

> 'Really what?' said Mrs. Steerforth.
> 'Oh! You mean it's *not!*' returned Miss Dartle. 'Well, I'm very glad to hear it! Now, I know what to do. That's the advantage of asking. I shall never allow people to talk before me about wastefulness and profligacy, and so forth, in connexion with that life, anymore.' (301)

Like her scar, Rosa's speech is also remarkable; it invokes precisely what it negates. Her mode of discourse, like the symbol of past violence written across her face, provokes an ambivalent fascination not only in David, but the reader as well (304). The significance of Rosa's irony eludes no one, yet neither is its meaning acknowledged: it is not to Rosa's intended meaning, but instead to the avowed frame of Rosa's speech that Mrs. Steerforth peremptorily replies, "and you shall be right" (302). This is irony of a particular sort; meaning is produced at the expense of the characters that surround Rosa, not because they are unable to share in the "joke" due to some limitation (for example, a lack of sophistication) but because public propriety will not allow them to acknowledge Rosa's meaning. Rosa's rhetoric reproduces, and thus draws silent attention to the social processes to which she is herself subject. Rosa's exclamatory negation, "You mean it's *not*!" leaves a trace that conjures precisely the never-spoken subject of the interchange (Steerforth's dissipations). By doing so the interchange brings to light not only something of Steerforth's character, but more importantly, points out the function of disavowal as both a social and cognitive process by which what is antithetical to social equanimity is publicly elided. However, Rosa's strident negations and pregnant ellipses serve most effectively to bring into relief precisely that which is left unspoken. As elsewhere in the novel, such silences are voluble. "Like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire," Rosa Dartle's scar persists doggedly in its signification (304).

Rosa's circumambulatory locution conjures mentally the fact of violence, even as it excludes violence from discourse. Thus her speech presents in microcosm the more general

methods of Dickens's narrative itself. The scar and its function suggests something of what Cedric Watts has called the novel's "covert plots," that is, the novel's tendency to produce dialectically "moral implications that work against, and substantially contradict, the moral implications of the main plot" (*The Deceptive Text* 34).[2] For *David Copperfield* self-consciously elides the suffering that exceeds the bounds of liberal propriety, even as the novel demonstrates emphatically that suffering is instrumental to the constitution of liberal subjectivity. The narrative's elisions consistently draw attention to themselves and their function, always stressing the presence of precisely what cannot be spoken, or written: "That I suffered in secret," Davy tells us, "and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How I suffered it is, I have said already, beyond my power to tell" (172). By drawing attention to his repeated omissions, David only emphasizes the violence and suffering his narrative redacts. D. A. Miller was certainly correct when he wrote in *The Novel and the Police*, "the story of David's liberation runs parallel to the story of his submission" (216). Yet the chiasmic "pattern" that Miller's reading so capably elicits, he argues, "can hardly be broadcast in the novel, which requires the functioning of the difference to structure its own plot" (220). For *David Copperfield* does in fact "broadcast," albeit silently or elliptically, the disavowed discipline and suffering that Dickens's shows to be indissolubly a part of liberal subject formation.

Miller's influential book, of which his final chapter on *David Copperfield* in many ways comprises the *tour de force*, quietly omits (particularly in this last chapter) direct commentary

[2] The Janus-faced structure of the novel, according to Cedric Watts, allows the novel to accommodate the opposed plots that "explain those elements of the text which at first may have seemed odd or anomalous, obscure or redundant" (30). Though I find Watts insights valuable, I do not share his evident desire to rationalize what is anomalous or obscure in a text, and certainly not to the point that what is strange or inconsistent in a text is made to "cohere logically as a sequence," even if that new totality is itself positioned as a sort of negation of a conventional perspective or plot (31).

on the novelist's control of those disciplinary "patterns" that Miller asserts are intrinsic to the nineteenth-century novel. Miller's book, as well as a huge amount of the criticism written in its image, tends not to afford the author any reflexive understanding of art's potential role in maintaining and reproducing public morality, but rather positions the novel as unreflectively engaged in a micropolitics of the subject. Surely one must be wary of installing the author as autonomous subject, free of the social and linguistic forces of which she is at once the agent and the creator. That said, it is at best contrived, and at worst disingenuous, to so readily characterize the nineteenth-century novel, and its authors, as uncritically allied with those formal social laws that enlightened critics denigrate as the intrinsically "carceral" conditions imposed by bourgeois morality. The criticism of the novel inspired by Foucault and/or Althusser depends on a vision of the author as unable to reflect beyond the system in which she is enmeshed (and from which, not unproblematically, the critic is somehow free). From this point of view, Victorian narrative, by narrating plots of resistance and individual development, only tightens the grasp of power: "As it forwards a story of social discipline," writes Miller of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), "the novel also advances the novel's omniscient world. It is frequently hard to distinguish the omniscience from the social control is parallels" (27-28). It is always unclear if Miller sees the author as complicit in, or simply ignorant of, the "disciplinary" function of her narrative, but what is certain is that Miller conflates "social control" with the aspiration to forms of shared understanding generally understood to be both a standard element of the nineteenth-century novel and essential to conceptions of liberal agency. The various political and ethical commitments of the novelists I consider in this study are neither uncritical of those commitments, nor unaware of the potential for art to become an instrument of those commitments.

A novel like *David Copperfield*, which has much to say about writing and authorship, repeatedly shows itself to be concerned with artistic representation's inclination to conceal what is most important for it to expose. By making a show of its practices of concealment, the novel only emphasizes the importance of what it hides. The same chapter I have been discussing above in *David Copperfield* ends with a brief vignette that seems to comment on precisely the narrative procedures to which I wish to direct attention. Having withdrawn to his room after the evening's pleasantries, David settles in, only to again be surprised by Rosa, but this time by a painted "likeness of Miss Dartle looking eagerly at me from above the chimney-piece"

> It was a startling likeness, and necessarily had a startling look. The painter hadn't made the scar, but *I* made it; and there it was, coming and going: now confined to the upper lip as I had seen it at dinner, and now showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer, as I had seen it when she was passionate. (306)

Having made the case for the double function of disavowal in the previous pages, Dickens here explicitly connects disavowal and artistic representation. Because David knows the secret, the artist's concealment of Rosa's defacement only exacerbates the power of that mark as a signifying force: the act of negation only makes the scar more pronounced, precisely by its absence. Moreover, a portrait that would have certainly been innocuous otherwise (like the woman herself), is made captivating by what it is known to conceal: as Taussig muses while meditating over a vandalized statue, "with defacement, the statue moves from an excess of invisibility to an excess of visibility" (52).

David, as the subject viewer, is once again in the position of subject reader, confronted again by the "invisible ink," as it were, of disavowal. Here David is faced by a figure of his own authorship. Like the head of King Charles I, which persists in its intrusions into Mr. Dick's personal histories, Rosa's scar, and Davy's history of abuse, will emerge to disrupt the narrative strategies that seek its suppression. Though the artistic

agency had pushed the scar, and its powers of signification, neatly beneath the surface of representation, David's knowledge insists on placing it back on the painted face, along with all the violence it represents, "showing the whole extent of the wound inflicted by the hammer." Just so for the reader; as Rosa's verbal negations had invoked precisely what was actively being suppressed and could do so only because that suppression was a corporate activity—a product of shared knowledge and understanding—the painting is exemplary of the way in which the traces of violence and suffering in *David Copperfield*, and in the Victorian novel more generally, inevitably "start forth like old writing on the wall."

Disavowal in the Victorian Novel

By avowing the ideals it also wishes to interrogate, the Victorian novel leaves itself open to critique that either ignores or does not understand the novel's propensity to express both the aspirations and the contradictions of the world it struggles to present. Yet ironically, those critical efforts that wish to understand every potentially subversive or unaccountable aspect of the novel as always already normative and disciplinary, find it necessary to disavow their own implied but unstated commitment to noncarceral individualism, and thus to an undamaged subjectivity that they are unable or unwilling to articulate.[3] Indeed much critical hay has been made of poststructuralism's disavowed normative commitment, its so-called "crypto-normativism," by the recent brand of liberal critique that turns to the nineteenth century and its literature in an effort to counter generally this hermeneutics of suspicion and, more specifically, to recuperate Victorian liberalism for the twenty first century. On the one hand, the Victorian novel has been read as

[3] See Habermas, *The Philisophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick Lawrence, (Boston: MIT, 1987), 337; also, Amanda Anderson, "Cryptonormativism and the Double Gesture," *Cultural Critique*, 21, 1992, 63-95.

unconsciously reproducing processes of discipline and violence in a fashion that naturalizes these processes for the subject as reader while in the process reshaping the reader as liberal subject. Exemplary here is D. A. Miller as I have shown, but also Nancy Armstrong's more recent *How the Novel Thinks*, in which she claims that "by pathologizing and criminalizing [certain] women, Victorian fiction justified [their] beating, drowning, burning, hanging or exiling" (80). These rather sensational approaches are countered, at the other extreme, by more recent forms of criticism that attempt to articulate the value of Victorian liberal idealism for our own time. David S. Malachuk has turned to the work of John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold in an effort to renovate "a perfectionist liberalism committed to the universal realization of objective moral goods that are nevertheless not metaphysical" (*Perfection* 7). Following Jürgen Habermas's critique of poststructuralism, scholars like Amanda Anderson and David Wayne Thomas have attempted to rethink our critical understanding of Victorian literary and political approaches to objectivity and in so doing to renovate and reimagine the possibility for normative consensus and its relation to liberal agency. Utilizing and revising Habermas's theory of communicative rationality in the process, these scholars have rediscovered in Victorian thought what Thomas calls, borrowing from Mill, a discourse of "individual 'many-sided-ness,'" that is exemplary of the "the liberal aspiration to critical self-consciousness" that he finds modeled in aesthetic experience (14-44). This liberal aspiration is founded on a cultivated openness to self-reflective awareness very similar to what Amanda Anderson has called the "power of cultivated detachment" (*Powers of Distance* 4-6).

More recently Anderson, informed by the work of John Rawls as well as Habermas, has forwarded a procedural ideal of legitimation that, "animated by a moral point of view committed to the enlargement of perspective that argument itself promotes and demands,"

she sees as "a normative model for the justification of specific political practices and institutions" (*The Way We Argue* 161). Generally speaking, this scholarly impulse wants to demonstrate that Victorian theorizations of a distanced, reflexive, and self-critical agency allow us to recuperate those conceptions of moral judgment and rational cooperation upon which the tradition of liberalism is based. Yet this scholarship all too often excludes any consideration of the violence so prevalent in the nineteenth-century novel and by doing so tends to reproduce in the service of its arguments the very processes of exclusion and disavowal that the Victorians were explicitly cautioning against. By contrast, I suggest here that texts often envisioned on the one hand as promulgating a disciplinary discourse, and on the other hand as exemplary of an idealized Victorian liberal discourse, instead expose the violence these books understand as sustaining liberal ideals. While liberalism's complicated relationship with and ultimate disavowal of exceptional violence is a central concern of both the political thought and the literary representation of the nineteenth century, this has gone generally unrecognized by Victorian Studies.

The novels I consider in this dissertation are acutely aware that although liberalism is predicated fundamentally on the triumph of right over might—and thus on the parliamentary or deliberative procedures as opposed to the power of absolute decree—the force of the arbitrary decision, what Carl Schmitt calls the exception, nonetheless remains the means by which conflict is resolved within the liberal context. That forms of political and social incommensurability demand the decision is the disavowed truth of liberal procedure. My dissertation examines the different ways in which the Victorian novel accommodates the paradoxes of disavowal as components of its form and envisions a sort of chiasmic relationship between violence and disavowal. In the worlds conjured by these novels, violence, exclusion, and ultimately disavowal preserves the inviolable identity of

consensual political procedure and human reason that subtends the liberal enterprise. Yet much as Rosa Dartle's scar provokes an undesired and "painful interest" for the eponymous protagonist of *David Copperfield*, disavowed violence haunts the narrative procedures of the Victorian novel, frustrating its aesthetic procedures of containment and closure. Thus we can read in the aesthetic dramas of Victorian narrative the mimetic expression of similar tensions in Victorian culture.

All of the texts I consider in this study are preoccupied by a sense that within the liberal context formal harmony depends on the exclusion of whatever might be antithetical to that harmony. This preoccupation is expressed as a prominent narrative tension reflecting a more general problem of liberalism: that the act of disavowal or exclusion must itself be disavowed, or else it threatens the formal harmony it is meant to maintain. A novel like W. M. Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847-8), for example, shows disavowal to be vital to navigating the expansive and highly formalized world it represents, even as its narrative persona argues, tongue firmly applied to cheek, that such practices are essential to his aesthetic project because "the moral world" exhibits an "insuperable repugnance to hearing vice called by its proper name" (812). The narrator reiterates this point even more explicitly: "There are things we do and know very well in Vanity Fair," he confesses, "though we never speak of them" (812). In "Vanity Fair," one is commonly forced to act in ways incommensurate with public propriety; but to do so transparently is to risk violence. To act openly forces the public recognition of actions that are best repudiated and is thus to show one's lack of cultivation. The unfortunate Betsy Horrocks, who, just like everyone else in the novel, works to fleece Sir Pitt Crawley, is not "genteel" enough to do it covertly, and therefore threatened with imprisonment, transportation, and even hanging, before she is finally banished from the community (*Vanity Fair* 506-510). Betsy falls outside of the

cultivated "categories of perception," as Bourdieu puts it, which "structure perception" and agency in the particular field of production to which she desires admission and thus becomes a candidate for reprisal and expulsion ("The Production of Belief" 278-279). Yet, Betsy risks reprisal not because she has committed a crime by attempting to steal from the baronet, but because she has threatened to reveal the operations of the game, that is, the systems of disavowal subtending what Bourdieu would call the "consecrated" regimes of cultivated society.

What is demanded of liberal propriety, as of the "decorous" narrator of *Vanity Fair*, is to present all "to the public in a perfectly genteel and inoffensive manner" (812). Nonetheless "those who like may peep down under the waves that are pretty transparent," and see there "the hideous monster's tail" "writhing and twirling, diabolically hideous and slimy, flapping amongst bones, or curling around corpses" (Thackeray 812). *Vanity Fair* is finally a book about the performance of propriety, and this concern is ironically reproduced in the novel's style: "above the water line," the apologist narrator mockingly asks the reader, "has not everything been proper, agreeable and decorous?" (812). But more than merely a critique of convention, *Vanity Fair* is also a commentary on the crucial synergy between the aesthetic and the ethical that, since the previous century, had been central to public morality. The rhetorical form of Thackeray's novel, by always hovering around the "pretty transparent" "water line" demarking public from private and moral from immoral, calls attention precisely to the foundation of public privacy on which propriety depends. By maintaining these divisions, disavowal holds together a world in which publicity and the cultivation of a public morality are critical to the accumulation of cultural capital.

Indeed, a long list of characters such as Thackeray's Becky Sharpe, Anthony Trollope's Lizzie Eustace, and in a different manner, George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel, all worry

the conflation of the beautiful and the good that at least since Shaftesbury in England, and Immanuel Kant in Germany, had been corporate in liberal notions of character and agency. Kant, for example, extends the concept of the aesthetic to public life, stipulating that a demand for transparency, or publicity, is inherent in the notion of right: "All actions that affect the rights of other men," writes Kant, "are wrong if their maxim is not consistent with publicity" (*Perpetual Peace* 135). The adjective "consistent" is particularly powerful in Kant's axiomatic usage: Agency is "consistent" within a public unity when it operates without contradiction within the bounds of that unity. We find a similar sense of consistency to be crucial to Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Smith's central concept of sympathy depends on public propriety to create a modicum of predictability for the agent. Fellow felling is simply not possible in Smith's theory of agency if the agent cannot imagine—that is, cannot in some sense predict—what the other is thinking or feeling. The fetishization of public agency in the liberal context, certainly by the nineteenth century, puts an excruciating amount of pressure on the agent. What is more, in an expanded social context like that of Victorian world (which is characterized, if by nothing else, by increasing pluralism of ideas and ways of knowing), the demands of character and public agency produce epistemological aporiae for the private subject.

In her recent book *Living Liberalism* (2010), Elaine Hadley argues that the mental attitude or mindset of the "mid-Victorian liberal subject," is characterized by "formalist predilections that continually seek to harmonize the disagreements, dissensions, and general disarray that otherwise upset the liberal mind" (9-12).[4] Hadley's work registers the

[4] Hadley's excellent book examines the formal constraints of what she calls "liberal cognition" and the difficulties of rendering abstract, private cogitation into its material form as opinion, which she argues is the engine of the Victorian political transformation. By looking at several historical and literary instantiations of what Hadley calls "abstract

epistemological challenges to these "formalizing predilections" of the liberal subject, which "registered as a chaotic social landscape, a heterogeneous alterity, menacingly bodily, which itself must be disinterestedly formalized by the judging individual," that is, by the liberal subject (*Living Liberalisms* 85). In a world of formal propriety, the "chaotic social landscape," as Hadley calls it, of a burgeoning mass culture poses a distinct challenge to the types of homogeneous social consensus on which the liberal agent found himself dependent. For Hadley liberalism describes a mode of agency and cognition as much as it designates a brand of formal political procedures. Similarly, Irene Tucker defines liberalism in her *A Probable State* (2000) as "a condition of subjectivity in which one's capacity to know and predict the contingent particularities of the material world—including the particularities of other people in specific social, political and economic relations to one—becomes the ground of one's operation as an agent" (25).[5] For Tucker, the historical "moment" when the subject's knowledge is no longer commensurate with the demands of her agency marks the transformation toward a new, more modern conception of liberalism. Whereas for Lauren M. E. Goodlad, the demise of earlier *laissez faire* forms of traditional liberalism fostered a progressive and "positive impulse to build character and promote social betterment by collective means," and indicated a renewed relationship between the individual and the State

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embodiment," that is, the materialization of formalized liberal cogitation—for example the signed opinion pieces of the *Fortnightly Review* and the emergence of the secret ballot—Hadley exposes the deep ambivalences of liberal cognition while at the same time providing examples of how "the two modalities of abstraction that constituted liberal subjectivity, that distance between the private realm of cognition (a place of impersonality) and the public realm of abstract politics (a place of nation, citizenship, empire) could be elegantly and effectively bridged" (15).

[5] In the context of this important book Tucker conceives of liberalism "as a theory of the relation between knowledge and agency" (25). For Tucker, the historical "moment" when the subject's knowledge is no longer commensurate with the demands of her agency marks not only a new, more modern conception of liberalism but also the "decline" of the realist novel, which Tucker argues is exemplified in the temporal irreconcilability of the twin narratives of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (25, 31).

(viii), for Tucker this same development was a response to epistemological crises for the individual, which mandated a new reliance on the state, and required from the state "everything from new social services to new modes of legal interpretation in order to mark and compensate for citizens' sudden incapacity" (26).

Crucially for Tucker, this sea change in the private and public functioning of liberalism is seen as itself concomitant with the "'decline"' of the realist novel, which Tucker argues is exemplified in the temporal and generic irreconcilability of the twinned but discordant English and Jewish narratives of George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (25; 31).[6] It is as if the novel responds to the particular transformation Tucker describes by ceasing to produce for its reader certain ways of understanding (as she calls it, appropriately quoting Michael McKeon) and instead delivers a "new mode of fictionality" in which this "new" novel itself "narrates the process of its obsolescence" (Tucker 31). As with many critics of the novel, in Tucker we get the developments of modernism precisely when the alignment of knowledge and action has been disrupted by social and epistemological heterogeneity. Up to this point, so the story goes, the nineteenth-century novel has reproduced the relatively stable epistemological worldviews analogous with liberalism. In its "formal techniques," writes Pericles Lewis, the novels of the period, both in England and on the Continent, "reflect [a] conception of society" commensurate with "that of nineteenth-century liberalism" (*Modernism, Nationalism* 8-9). The "functioning of the novelistic universe depends on the narrator's role as a neutral arbiter," Lewis asserts, and "like the state in liberal political thought," the narrator "acts as guarantor of the shared, social reality" (9). "Just as the liberal

[6] While I find this this specific formulation very useful, to pinpoint such a precise historical as well as aesthetic instance elides the general and persistent anxieties (registered in earlier Eliot and Dickens certainly, if not already in a novel like Tobias Smollett's *Humphry Clinker* (1771)) regarding the relationship between agency and the epistemological adequacy of the subject in England's rapidly changing social and economic environment.

state is the instrument of a neutral law and justice," he continues, "so in the realist novel the narrator is the instrument of objectivity and truth in a world where the competing claims of individuals threaten to undermine social harmony" (Lewis 9). The fictions of nineteenth-century narrative, the argument goes, by modeling liberal procedures promoting shared understanding, resolve symbolically for their readerships the sorts of existential inconsistencies that seem impossible for their readers to surmount. It is no wonder then that with this general conception of the nineteenth-century novel secure, a brand of neoliberal scholarship has recently turned to the Victorian novel and begun to use it as an instrument in an effort to renovate liberalism for its own time.

Modernity and Incommensurability

Within the liberal context, order depends at some level on reflexive decision making processes that enable the individual to act in accordance with some abstract, unbiased, and shared appraisal of what constitutes rational moral and political action. If liberalism's essential tension stems from its twin commitments to liberty and equality then, generally speaking, in its various forms the liberal intellectual tradition attempts to bridge this contradiction by relying on theorizations of human agency that are guided by an ethic of rational cooperation. For Matthew Arnold, for instance, man finds the objectification of his own rational perfection in culture: "culture suggests the idea of *the State*, [the] organ of our collective best self, of our national right reason" (101). Similarly an "apotheosis of reason" undergirds John Stuart Mill's belief in *The Subjection of Women* (1869) that "we are entering into an order of things" in which the civilized individual acquiesces as a matter of course to the "virtue" of living "together as equals…claiming nothing for themselves but what they as freely concede to everyone else" (136, 180). Evident in both Mill and Arnold here is the

deontic force of those Victorian constructions of character and community obligation that in his *Public Moralists* (1991) Stefan Collini has called the "unreflective Kantianism of Victorian moral commonplaces" (63). Indeed one can detect in Mill's worlds the same stress on reciprocity and public consistency that, as I will discuss in more detail below, is central to Kant's notion of cosmopolitan right.

These types of formative political visions have their rough contemporary expression in the work of John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas. In Rawls's notion of "overlapping consensus" the political sphere (as opposed to the more broadly conceived Habermasian public sphere) is organized around "reasonable and comprehensive doctrines" in which all capable, reasoning agents can agree most fundamentally on abstract notions of what is fair, what is right, and what is just (*Political Liberalism* 44, 216-218).[7] There is, Rawls suggests, "but one public reason," which is determined, roughly speaking, by an appeal to the mutual accord of all interested constituents and that is dependent on a common idiom of legitimacy (220). By reflectively abstracting herself to an "original position" unobstructed by prejudice and making certain that her reasons are in accord with "public reason," the agent may thus ensure the legitimacy to her own actions. Though Habermas's notion of the "ideal discourse situation" and Rawls's "original position" are by no means equatable, they are similar in several respects. Most notably, they are both idealizations meant to theoretically dispense with what they see to be the intrinsic partiality of the subject-centered perspective by introducing an intersubjective reference point of ethical and rational consensus. For

[7] In an "overlapping consensus" constituents agree to a common set of principles, but do so for different reasons, or at least, with separate and distinct ends in mind. This idea of a private and public self, complete with private and public interests and motivations, as we shall see, is a central concept for both Mill and Arnold. What synergizes these two often conflicting selves is, of course, the application to and endorsement of ever more improved, that is to say, ever more rational procedures.

Habermas a "model of unconstrained consensus formation in a communication community [engenders] communicatively structured lifeworlds that reproduce themselves via the palpable medium of action oriented to mutual agreement" (*Philosophical Discourse* 295). Habermas's communicative action is oriented precisely toward overcoming the forms of incommensurability that mark the modern liberal context, and toward doing so without recourse to the avowedly arbitrary political decisionism forwarded by more modern proponents of Hobbesian natural law such as Carl Schmitt. Though it is hardly a new political insight that force sustains social order or that "might makes right," liberalism was meant to have dispensed with this need. Thus any bald recognition of the political function of violence is generally deemed antithetical to liberal ideals, whose putative legitimacy derives inherently from laws that, since Kant, are understood to be universal, reciprocal, and public (*Perpetual Peace* 135-136).

Yet as Hobbes wrote in *Leviathan*, "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all" (97). For the political realist who is inspired by Hobbesian natural law, the word simply requires the sword because pure abstract legalism does not contend well with particularity or incommensurability. Because the word, as it were, is too easily made to contain a broad spectrum of possible meanings and intentions, proper political order requires the sovereign decision. For thinkers like Schmitt, the decision is required precisely due to the incommensurability that is part and parcel of the modern, democratized world.[8] In a disenchanted world, Max Weber writes in "Science as a

[8] For a good overview of the problem see Steven Lukes, "Making Sense of Moral Conflict," in *Liberalism and the Moral Life*, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), 127-142. For Lukes incommensurability is the "nontrivial" conflict deriving from a situation where "there is no single currency or scale on which conflicting values can be measured, and that where a conflict occurs no rationally compelling appeal can be made to some value that will resolve it" (135).

Vocation," "the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion. Thus it is necessary to make a decisive choice."[9] In short, Schmitt's concept of the political is one response to the heightened sense of incommensurability that he, like Weber, associated with modernity. Habermas's is another: the task of the "ideal speech situation" is to "vindicate the power of discursively attained rational consensus," and to furthermore demonstrate that "practical questions admit of truth" (*Legitimation Crisis* 103, 111). Communicative rationality, which recasts the Kantian argument for an autonomous moral subject in intersubjective terms, is meant not only to resolve the problem of incommensurability, but also to guard against the type of decisionism found in Schmitt. For this reason Habermas is central to Amanda Anderson's renewed call for the value of liberal proceduralism, which she understands as a "normative model for the justification of specific political practices and institutions. The aim is to elaborate those processes, rules, and procedures that will determine legitimate or justifiable outcomes" (*The Way We Argue* 161).

Crucial to proceduralism is "the development of a distinctive culture of public debate in civil society [that] provides the conditions for a new form of communicative practice in which the force of any given argument is given precedence over the status of the speaker" (*The Way We Argue* 165). The ideal of disinterested cooperation evident in Anderson's thinking, and so crucial to rational consensus formation, redefines the function of

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[9] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, 148. Weber: Whatever choices we are faced with "through out all the orders of life," "according to our ultimate standpoint, one is the devil the other the God." It is exactly this vision of modernity that provides the impetus for Carl Schmitt's infamous "friend/enemy" distinction from *The Concept of the Political*, and which warrants the decisionist concept of the exception that he develops in *Political Theology*. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*. Also, see *Political Theology*, 11-15. Conversely, it is precisely in response to this sort of vision that Adorno heralds the importance of the negative dialectic: "dialectics is not a standpoint."

centralized authority, such as Matthew Arnold's conception of the State, or the Kantian *ius cosmopoliticum*. Procedural rationality imagines a universal, if not actually transcendental or metaphysical moral normativity to which the individual adheres, as if naturally and voluntarily, as both agent and subject. As Meredith Evans has noted, Kant's powerful conceptualization of a universal right of humanity, which is meant to recognize but take precedence over more parochial forms of agency and affiliation, is not "dismissive" of a Hobbesian or Schmittian conception of the political, but "takes it as its *raison d'etre*" (75). This is clearly the case for Arnold as well. Arnold aestheticizes the concept of rational consensus in his *Culture and Anarchy* while postulating that the sort of rational reciprocity to be found in culture is precisely what separates man from a state of nature: "By our everyday selves we are separate, at war…we find no basis for a firm authority in our ordinary selves; culture suggests one to us in our *best self*" (99 Arnold's emphasis).

This broaches a really central point: At some level most versions of liberalism, with its reliance on positive law, are an attempt to contend with incommensurability while overcoming the need for the arbitrary decision. To combat these measures, Carl Schmitt argues in his *Political Theology* that during the late eighteenth and then nineteenth centuries, liberal political and legal procedures took on the "characteristic of the natural sciences" (41). As a result the "state and legal order [came to be] based on the rejection of all 'arbitrariness,' and attempt[ed] to banish from the realm of the human mind every exception" (*Political Theology* 41). For Schmitt the work of John Stuart Mill epitomizes this cognitive drive to exclude what is arbitrary or irrational, though surely this impulse describes the history of liberalism more generally. One significant result of the processes of rationalization Max Weber called disenchantment is that the sovereign's unequivocal right to use violence to sustain social and political order was ultimately disclaimed in an effort to preserve the

identity of consensual political procedure and human reason. In short, because might is no longer seen as commensurate with human rationality, violence in its various forms must be disavowed in the liberal context. Rather than using force as a means of dealing with the sorts of valid but irreconcilable claims that mark a liberal plurality, and which are antithetical to the formal harmony sought by the liberal subject, deliberative democracy by and large seeks, through formal argumentation, to produce accord in the form of rational consensus. This reliance on procedure is a core principle of liberalism, one that we can trace back to Locke and the notion that "through openness and discussion alone" can the "victory of right over might be achieved."[10]

The nineteenth century, however, posed a real challenge to idealized conceptions of formal rationality. The political and economic force that was cosmopolitan liberalism had produced a world of social and political pluralism that resisted the sorts of formalization required by liberalism. Thus, while the nineteenth century was the period of liberalism's triumph, it was also the moment of liberalism's great confusion in the face of the transformation it had wrought. Certainly one need not delve too deeply into the historical, literary, and periodical output of the nineteenth century before it becomes clear that the democratized Victorian social sphere was increasingly characterized by a mass of divergent political interests. In other words, Victorian society had succumbed to the inevitable "identity of state and society" that Schmitt called "depoliticization" (*Concept of the Political* 22). This negation of the political, for Schmitt, inevitably leads to a "political practice of distrust" pervading all social relationships (*Concept of the Political* 70). Jean-François Kervégan describes the development succinctly:

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[10] John Locke, *Two Treatises on Government*. Qtd. in Ellen Kennedy, "Introduction" to Carl Schmitt, *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, (Cambridge: MIT, 1988), xviii.

> for Schmitt, either the State imposes order and its rationality to a civil society characterized by pluralism, competition and disorder, or, as is the case in liberal democracy, social pluralism will empty the political entity of its meaning and bring it back to its *other*, the state of nature.[11]

Kervégan articulates not only Schmitt's concerns precisely, but also the concerns of many notable Victorian writers and thinkers. Kervégan's reading of Schmitt mirrors Matthew Arnold's fears that under the pressure of the democratic impulse culture would degenerate into anarchy. Arnold had begun his essay *Democracy* (1859) with a quote from Burke: "…since the Revolution, along with many dangerous, many useful powers of Government have been weakened."[12] Certainly by the time Arnold published *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) a decade later, at least one of the "useful powers of Government" Arnold eulogizes is the use of sovereign force to quell social unrest: in order to "not to perish miserably in anarchy and confusion," Arnold argues, seemingly channeling continental thinkers like Kant and Schiller, modern man requires the "authority" that "culture suggests [in] the idea of the *State*" (99-100 Arnold's emphasis).

Yet there is no need to paint Arnold as an authoritarian statist in order to see that he recognized the role of violent force as indispensible to the maintenance of political and social stability. Arnold was writing in the aftermath of the English Reform Act of 1867, and portions of *Culture and Anarchy*, such as the chapter "Doing As One Likes," were composed specifically in response to the social political unrest, such as the so-called Hyde Park Riots of 1866, which was in many ways the hallmark of this period in England. Similarly the plot of George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) pivots on scenes of political violence and was, like Arnold's book, also a product of this unstable political climate in which the question of State authority

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[11] Qtd. in Mouffe, *The Challenge of Carl Schmitt*, 49.
[12] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, qtd. in "Democracy," *Matthew Arnold: Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings*, 1.

had for some time once again loomed large. There is in Arnold's pragmatic sanctioning of the State, and state violence, a clear tension with that guarded optimism evident a decade earlier in J. S. Mill's *On Liberty* (1859), in which Mill, firmly in the Lockean tradition, forecasted that Authority would no be longer required as a necessary complement to Liberty (7-21). Nonetheless, though Mill is understood, in many ways correctly, to be the Victorian champion of individualism, Mill's vision of the individual was hardly allied with the improprietous and self-interested majority itself.[13] In this sense Mill's thought was not essentially opposed to Arnold's, and Mill himself understood a "social feeling" of sympathy and commitment to be the overwhelming requirement of moral individualism that he called character.

Though Arnold lamented the ineffectuality of "our military force" because it, though an "overwhelming force," "in riots never does act" (85), Dickens had parodied precisely such a position twelve years earlier in *Little Dorrit*, when the supercilious Mrs. Gowan and her compatriots agree that, "had Augustus Stiltstockings in a general way ordered the cavalry out with instructions to charge," instead of "'conciliating the mob'" "the country would have been preserved" (333). Mrs. Gowan's referent here, given the temporal setting of the novel, is the Peterloo violence of the early part of the century, but Dicken's readership would have recognized an allusion to the Chartist violence that was contemporaneous with the novel's publication. The point is that the literary and intellectual production of the period exhibits a deep preoccupation with the exception and does so precisely because of the generalized unrest that is characteristic of a depoliticized society. For while the second half of the century was characterized by a relative absence of violence abroad, this period could hardly be called peaceful, but was rather a time of domestic unrest and anxiety in England over

[13] See Collini, 68-76.

which the shadow of the French Revolution cast an intensifying shadow. Not only for the more radical observers like Friedrich Engels did revolutionary violence seem imminent during this period.[14] As Dickens wrote in a letter to a friend in 1855:

> I believe the discontent [of the working classes] to be so much the worse for smoldering instead of blazing openly, that it is extremely like the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution, and is in danger of being turned by any one of a thousand accidents—a bad harvest—the last straw too much of much of aristocratic insolence or incapacity—a defeat abroad—a mere chance at home—into such a devil of a conflagration as has never been beheld since. (*Letters* 587)

If "condition of England" novels such as Mary Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1854) and Dickens' own *Hard Times* (1854) captured how such discontent was related directly to the working conditions of the working class in England, then Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) should be read not merely as a popular rendering of a historical moment by which the nineteenth century was enthralled, but chiefly as a warning to English readers regarding the potential for such discontent to blossom into full blown revolution within the boundaries of their own nation.[15] Nineteenth-century fiction, like nineteenth-century society, had to come to terms in some way with the latent violence that it understood as inseparable from its contemporary moment.

Narrative Exceptions

It is hardly coincidence that 1859 saw the publication of not only *Adam Bede*, which aligned its visions of internal violence with its historical scaffolding of the Napoleonic Wars,

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[14] Engels wrote that "the deep wrath of the whole working class…before too long a time goes by, a time almost within the power of man to predict, must break out into a Revolution in comparison with which the French Revolution, and the year 1794, will prove to have been child's play." Engels, *Conditions of the Working Class in England*, 31.

[15] See Jones, "The Redemptive Power of Violence? Carlyle, Mark and Dickens," *History Workshop Journal* 65.3 (2008): 1-22. Jones reads just this sort of relationship in Carlyle's work *The French Revolution* and his essays on the "Condition of England-Question."

but also Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, as well as one of the ur-texts of modern liberalism in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*. These works all share a sense of the immanence of conflict to human sociality; that in a world pregnant with violence, conflict had to be accommodated in some form by its artistic and intellectual representation. Despite the various ways these respective works can and have been read as envisioning a progressive teleology leading out of, and away from, violent conflict, they all also self-consciously recognize the very real threat that such violence would only engender repeated conflict. George Eliot reflects an anxiety about latent conflict in her essay "The *Antigone* and Its Moral." Sophocles' play, writes Eliot, "appeals to perennial human nature" by pointing out the antagonisms immanent to sociality:

> Whenever the strength of man's intellect, or moral sense, or affection brings him into opposition with the rules which society has sanctioned, *there* is renewed the conflict between Antigone and Creon; such a man must not only dare to be right, he must also dare to be wrong—to shake faith, to wound friendship, perhaps, to hem in his own powers. (*Critical Writings* 246)

Eliot's reading of Sophocles, which comes directly from Hegel, suggests the difficulties Eliot herself saw in assigning ethical values in the abstract to specific human activity. Neither Creon nor Antigone can obey both of the conflicting, yet valid laws to which each is subject; in Hegel's reading, as in Eliot's, the actions of each are ultimately validated by their rational and universal aim.[16] Thus we get a sense in both Hegel and Eliot of the incommensurability each saw as intrinsic to human relations, and which I have been arguing is a principal concern of liberal thought. The "best moral we can draw" from *Antigone*, writes Eliot, is that "our protest of the right should be seasoned with moderation and reverence" (246). Yet Eliot seems to have little faith in the moral she derives, that is, in the motivation for man or

[16] For the relevant reading of *Antigone* by Hegel, see, *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Aesthetics, Vol 1*., particularly around pages 221 and 464, respectively.

nation in her own historical moment "to hem in his own powers" in the fashion that liberalism requires. Instead, the sorts of incommensurability that Eliot described as the "antagonism of valid claims" can ultimately only be resolved through potentially violent conflict.

The way in which, from the French revolution onward, the making of history had thrust itself, violently, onto the nineteenth-century consciousness in many respects gives realism its traction during the period: the age was preoccupied, above all else, with the image of the history it felt itself to be making, even if the image reflected back at itself was at times monstrous. With the publication of Charles Darwin's *The Origin of the Species*, also in 1859, this image became more monstrous still, particularly as the vision of human development Darwin theorized appeared to be realized in the generalized competition and self-interested individualism of English culture under the sway of capitalism and the series of English reform laws in 1832, 1867, and again in 1884-85. This all ran counter to that progressive liberal discourse based on notions of character and public morality. Epitomizing the adage that the myths that fall victim to enlightenment are themselves the product of enlightenment, the idea of the autonomous moral individual, and the progressive culture that grows up around him or her, were suddenly put in jeopardy by the unsettling and divergent epistemologies in the latter half of the century. Yet rather than effecting its disintegration, the public moralism of Victorian society only redoubled its efforts at overcoming the potentially monstrous connotations of man's involvement with (rather than domination of) the natural world and sought to do so precisely through the ordering of intention and agency in those all familiar Victorian concepts of character and will.[17] This required a Platonic separation of mind and body in an effort to overcome the separation between public and

[17] See Collini, *Public Moralists*, Chapters 2 & 3 especially.

private forms of agency, as this quotation from Mill indicates: "In an improving state of the human mind, the influences are constantly on the increase which tend to generate in each individual a feeling of unity with all the rest; which feeling, if perfect, would make him never think of, or desire, any beneficial condition for himself, in the benefits of which they are not included."[18] His use of the conditional shows that Mill was well aware that these words in no way described his contemporary milieu; that is, that the conditions of this "unity" had not yet arrived. Nonetheless, the passage emphasizes the distinct, even exaggerated opposition of public and private thought and actions that Victorian idealizations sought to resolve through consensus (Collini 69).

This dialectic between public and private constitutes a central structural motif of the nineteenth-century novel. The novel is deeply romantic in the sense that it is driven by the inevitable dissatisfactions that arise inwardly for the subject when faced with the incommensurability of "a conceptual system which can never completely capture life and a life complex which can never attain completeness."[19] The Victorian novel self-consciously duplicates in its form and theme the containment strategies aligned with public propriety while simultaneously showing these strategies to be always troubled by the private repudiated other for which these strategies are intended. In other words, the narrative procedures of the novel that seek coherence and closure are haunted and frustrated by the corresponding strain of disavowal that the novel itself struggles to contain. In the same way, liberal proceduralism cannot adequately contend with those forces that subtend its own existence, that is, power and in the absence of power, violence. Like the novels that are the subject of this study, proceduralism must also exclude and suppress the violence and coercion that are

[18] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*. Qtd. in Collini, 69.
[19] Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel,* 77.

antithetical to the legitimization process, even as it employs those means to forcibly achieve resolution. In this way the exception organizes from without. For ultimately proceduralism cannot itself escape the need for decision and exclusion but instead projects this need into the putatively democratic realm of process, and subjects it to the ultimate authority of a discourse model of legitimacy. Proceduralism, argues Anderson, provides the opportunity for "argument as ethos [to] always trump identity as ethos" (*The Way We Argue* 182). Evident in Anderson's statement, which reiterates her argument forwarding cosmopolitan detachment as a deliberative cognitive model, is proceduralism's essential movement toward exclusion: pluralism necessitates that the troublesome category of identity be effaced in favor of the power of discourse ethics, of cosmopolitan detachment, and of universalism.

Because such processes are themselves exclusionary, and never truly consensual, they too require the latent power of the violent exception, however disavowed, in order to function. As Chantal Mouffe has argued, procedures of consensus formation cannot operate without the logic of inclusion-exclusion: "consensus in a liberal-democratic society is—and always will be—the expression of a hegemony and the crystallization of power relations. The frontier it establishes between what is and what is not legitimate is a political one, and for that reason it should remain contestable" (*Challenge* 46). That this frontier does not remain contestable, but is always fixed by the "force of the best argument," as Anderson would have it, is the political reality of proceduralism (*The Way We Argue* 182). The Habermasian arguments against poststructuralism tend to pivot on the intrinsic crypto-normativism of poststructuralism, that is, the perceived disjunction between poststructuralism's radical politics and its normative ethics. However, "the linguistically conceived paradigm of mutual understanding" that Habermasian proceduralism believes resolves this "impasse," as I will argue in the next chapter, can itself be seen to depend on

disavowal, or what we might call procedural liberalism's crypto-decisionism. Habermasian proceduralism exhibits a central problem of liberalism as its own internal contradiction. The nineteenth-century novel is attuned to these sorts of discrepancies and reflects them in its narrative procedures.

Charles Dickens's novels draw the reader's attention to the means by which what is incompatible with a formal, bourgeois morality is excluded from and submerged beneath the realm of open and public discourse. As Mrs. General instructs Amy Dorrit in *Little Dorrit* (1857), "nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at [for] it hardly seems compatible with refinement of mind. A truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of the existence of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid and pleasant" (501). Mrs. General, certainly an ironic figure in *Little Dorrit*, nonetheless illuminates for Dickens's reader the means supporting the ends of bourgeois refinement. Dickens, like other nineteenth-century novelists working in the comic style, was well aware of the middle-class sensibilities of his readership; for Dickens, Trollope, and Thackeray, the success of the ironic mode often depended on an established normativity shared by both reader and writer.[20] The sustained, even labored comic approach of those chapters in *Little Dorrit* devoted to the bureaucracy of the Circumlocution Office is exemplary of why Dickens is often seen as typical of the consensus producing effects of the nineteenth-century novel.[21] However, working against an ironic mode vested with consensus making powers is a darker, more disruptive form of comedy in Dickens. For example, the comedic but violently abusive relationship of Jeremiah Flintwinch and Miss Affrey in *Little Dorrit* depends on explicit violence or practices of

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[20] While perhaps generally accurate, this sort of claim elides the complexity of the problem in nineteenth-century narrative, as I hope to show, even as it ignores the ironic mode's similar dependence on shared norms in much modernist narrative, for example, in the narrative procedures of James Joyce's *The Dead*.

[21] See, for example, Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism*, 49-50.

exclusion for its punch lines, repeatedly transforming spite or violence into laughter. Flintwinch's abuse of Affery is in each instance presented metaphorically, through processes of comedic obfuscation—"You want another dose? You shall have it my woman, you shall have a good one! Oh! You shall have a sneezer, you shall have a teaser!" (719). Because the metaphor operates by catachresis—Flintwinch's offered "dose" is hardly medicinal—this rhetoric immediately puts its own processes of signification under increased pressure. The ironized metaphor functions negatively, rather than working by substitution and similarity. This absurd rhetoric follows Affrey and Flintwich through the novel, negating the necessity of calling violence by its proper name, but calling attention to the means by which violence is publicly suppressed, and made collectively private.

Like Affrey's "dreaming," Dickensian narrative has a tendency to expose troubling facts, but in the process of doing so also make a play of obscuring precisely what it exposes. Dickens performs for the reader the sort of slight of hand that maintains "the graceful equanimity of surface," in the parlance of Mrs. General while remaining fully cognizant of precisely that which threatens both social and aesthetic equanimity. In the overt and clumsy process of seeming "ignorant of anything not proper, placid and pleasant," Dickens brings such peculiarities rather to the forefront of his narratives. Like the Clennam house itself, Dicken's novels are "full of mysteries and secrets; full of whisperings and counsels; full of noises," which, as Affrey attests, "you'd feel that they was so worth speaking of, that you'd feel you nigh bursting, through not being allowed to speak of 'em" (720). In the same way that the Clennam house strains to contain what goes on, unacknowledged and unspoken, within its confines, there is a certain pregnancy to Dickens's narrative, deriving from its inability to fully contend with the dissonances that form a necessary component of its novelistic expression. The strange, the violent, the perverse, and the ugly all threaten the

structural integrity of his narrative and menace the narrative's will to resolution and closure. This is true of any number of Victorian novels; a novel like *Vanity Fair*, for example, expresses doubts and indecisions regarding the possibility of its ending—and about just what to do with Becky Sharp—through at least the final hundred pages of the book. Though certainly to some extent Thackeray's indecisiveness can be attributed to the demands of serial authorship, nonetheless, the protracted and repeatedly deferred conclusion of the novel is finally effected though the exceptional circumstances of a (not too) suspicious death, and a public secret: "there were reasons," we are assured, "why all should remain silent regarding [Becky Sharp]" (Thackeray 873). The novel goes silent with that secret intact, and with its (lack of) resolution harried by a negative tension, for everyone—the reader included—is pretty certain that Clytemnestra has again triumphed through fatal means.

Something, it seems, always has to give. In *Little Dorrit*, the Clennam house itself implodes, killing the scourge that is Rigaud and with him the knowledge that threatens the novel's conventional Victorian resolution (finally achieved through the marriage of Arthur and Amy). With Rigaud's timely and unnatural death, and with Mrs. Clennam suddenly relieved of the capacity for speech, epistemological harmony is restored through the "miraculous" removal of what is antipathetic to it; literally, the bad forms of knowledge are extirpated from the scene under extraordinary circumstances. In a similar way, at the end of George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), a flood sweeps away whatever moral or aesthetic problems block the novel's will to resolution. Again, what is hostile to the dominant modality of self-understanding, namely Maggie Tulliver, must be destroyed in order for a kind of harmony to be restored to prototypically Protestant St. Oggs. The exceptional means by which these novels are concluded, in other words, through events that transgress fully the conventional boundaries of realism, only calls attention to the violent means by

which order is returned to the narrative as well as to a self-consciously reflexive operation for which these novels, and these novelists are seldom credited. The violent endings of novels like *Adam Bede* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* are only different in degree, so to speak, in that the violence through which these novels achieve resolution is procedural.

When Carl Schmitt wrote, "the exception is like the miracle in theology," he likely did not have in mind the god-like author as the executor of miracles, but the analogy between the absolute powers of the writer and those of the sovereign is, I think, particularly apt. The Victorian novel, like the social world that is its subject, can never reconcile the divergent interests that comprise it without recourse to the exception. Without violence, the novel struggles to contain and organize what is opposed to its aesthetic harmony, but inevitably fails and in doing so exposes the impasses, discrepancies, and conflicts intrinsic to the social environment with which it contends. In this way, the Victorian novel emerges as a uniquely appropriate medium in which to examine the problems of violence, exclusion, and disavowal that prove so essential to nineteenth-century British culture. In one way or another, all of the novels I consider in the pages to come find violence or other exceptional means necessary to prompt their closure. In short, though in its will to consensus formation the operations of the realist novel are often seen as "parliamentary, rather than absolutist," we find that, just like the liberal society it is understood to depict, the often protracted procedures of the nineteenth-century novel requires the decision to realize aesthetic harmony (Lewis 9).

As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, George Eliot's *Adam Bede* self-consciously interrogates the theological and as such exceptional character of legal violence. Eliot's first novel demonstrates how the sacred character of the legal institution is created by the normative consensus it simultaneously secures through the use of violence—violence that by

its very nature temporarily suspends and functions outside of the community norms it sustains. *Adam Bede* does not simply reproduce the scapegoat mechanism, nor does the novel seek merely to demystify its social processes. Rather, in *Adam Bede* Eliot emphasizes the deliberative character of collectivized and procedurally legitimized violence. In *Adam Bede* George Eliot shows the reader that arbitrary violence, rather than deliberative forms of procedure, is the means by which conflict and crisis are resolved. Though ultimately disavowed by the community, the violent decision is finally the singular legitimizing component of the "deliberate" processes by which Hayslope condemns Hetty to death and thereby restores order to the community. I will try to show in the pages that follow that in *Adam Bede* George Eliot ultimately exposes the crypto-decisionism that is the disavowed norm of liberal procedure.

POLITICAL THEOLOGY IN GEORGE ELIOT'S *ADAM BEDE*

"There's no rule so wise but it's a pity for somebody or other."[1]

In George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, the reader last sees Hetty Sorrel being led toward the gallows, accompanied by the Methodist enthusiast Dinah Morris, to be hanged for the crime of infanticide.

> It was a sight that some people remembered better even than their own sorrows—the sight in that grey clear morning, when the fatal cart with the two young women in it was descried by the waiting watching multitude, cleaving its way towards the hideous symbol of a deliberately-inflicted sudden death. (502)

The subject of the predicate in the passage's final clause is ambiguous and made even more so by the contranymous participle "cleaving": Is the "waiting watching multitude," compelled toward the gallows, "cleaving its way toward the hideous symbol," or is "the fatal cart" and "the two young women" forcing a way through the throng of the multitude? It is difficult to know, but the ambiguity here only adds to the richness of the passage, redoubling the grotesque importance of the "multitude" while also emphasizing the seemingly magnetic power of the object to which Eliot wants to draw the reader's attention: the "hideous symbol of a deliberately inflicted death." The final sentence of the passage introduces yet another ambiguity: Eliot stresses that Hetty's death will be "deliberately inflicted." The death sentence has been delivered with measured intent, as would be, we can assume, the violent

[1] George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, 589.

act of execution itself.[2] Yet "deliberately" also underscores that the verdict against Hetty, "to be hanged by the neck till you be dead," has been arrived at by a jury's deliberation, a hallmark of procedural democracy (474-5).

Amanda Anderson argues that "proceduralism is a normative model for the justification of specific political practices and institutions…the aim is to elaborate those processes, rules and procedures that will determine legitimate or justifiable outcomes" (*The Way We Argue* 161). Yet if procedural rationality is indeed a means of inducing "legitimate" outcomes, *Adam Bede* demonstrates that proceduralism arrives at what is legitimate only by excluding what is deemed illegitimate. Legitimacy in such a case is merely the product of an arbitrary, and in some cases violent, decision. Questions of legitimacy arise and require that a decision be made because abstract moral or legal norms do not contend well with particulars, and the instances of circumstantial, moral, or political incommensurability that regularly give rise to conflict within the polity do not lend themselves to resolution or "legitimate outcomes" very easily (hence the staggeringly complex and inefficient legal apparatuses of most modern democracies). The putative power of procedure to resolve such conflict derives from what Anderson describes as the impersonal "enlargement of perspective," which empties the specific contingencies of any one case of their power to affect the treatment of that case from an impartial "moral point of view" (*The Way We Argue Now* 161). But in *Adam Bede* Eliot establishes the legitimacy of the particular itself and in the process demonstrates that it is precisely from the moral point of view that particularities

[2] Hetty's death sentence is commuted at "The Last Moment" (*Adam Bede* 502-3). Hetty is only "saved" so that she may be transported and, upon the expiration of the term of her sentence, die aboard a ship while trying to return to England. I will argue that the details of Hetty's protracted demise, which exist at a vestigial remove in the final book of Eliot's narrative, are meant intentionally to haunt what is *Adam Bede's* otherwise harmonious resolution.

matter. Furthermore Eliot's novel illustrates that violent exclusion, and not deliberative procedure, is the means by which conflict and crisis are resolved within the liberal context. Though ultimately disavowed by the community, the violent decision is shown in *Adam Bede* to be the singular legitimizing component of the "deliberate" processes by which Hayslope condemns Hetty to death and thereby restores order to the community.

This chapter reads the verdict against Hetty, and her ultimate scapegoating by the community of Hayslope, as an instance of what Carl Schmitt describes as the violent exception. Schmitt contends that the "homogeneous medium" in which normative forms of legal and political activity flourish requires the exclusion or excision of what is incommensurate with the norm, and as such threatens the stability of the polity (*Political Theology* 13). The absolute priority of homogeneity to political stability underwrites Schmitt's infamous friend/enemy distinction, which for Schmitt is the criterion "to which all political actions and motives can be reduced" (*Concept of the Political* 26). I argue that George Eliot understands the arbitrary decision as the always unavoidable means of conflict resolution within the liberal context. Moreover, in *Adam Bede* Eliot seeks to draw attention to the cognitive processes by which both the individual and the community disavows the violence that is essential to community stability. Because George Eliot has become a touchstone for the recent trend in nineteenth-century literary scholarship that looks to the Victorian period to renovate liberal ideals for the twenty first century, it is crucial that we not overlook the significance of violence in her novels. To do so is only to reproduce the very processes of exclusion and disavowal that Victorians like George Eliot were explicitly cautioning against. For Eliot's novels interrogate the very ideals to which they are committed and as such exhibit an anxious preoccupation regarding the important but largely unacknowledged role violence plays in preserving community norms and stability. *Adam Bede* ultimately questions

why the violent decision persists in procedures and operations whose *raison de'être* derives putatively from the liberal triumph of right over might, and in doing so the novel explores a central impasse of liberalism. This particular concern, I argue, has generally not been acknowledged or addressed by the new turn in Victorian Studies that attempts to recuperate Victorian conceptions of objectivity and proceduralism in the name of deliberative democracy.

Adam Bede critiques the processes of consensus formation that today are generally understood to characterize the function of realist narrative and to sustain the legitimizing aspirations of liberal proceduralism. However, as I will show in the pages that follow, the novel demonstrates that in each case consensus requires violence. For George Eliot punitive violence functions as a sort of political stopgap, a measure meant to quell Victorian anxieties regarding those forms of shared understanding that underwrite liberal notions of deliberative agency. Violence channels Victorian insecurities about deliberative action through the cathartic drama of sacrifice. *Adam Bede* characterizes Hetty Sorrel's trial, narrowly averted execution, and finally her transportation as sacrificial and in doing so exposes the theological character of legal and political violence. In the end Eliot shows how the sacred and therefore legitimizing character of the legal institution depends on consensual rationality secured through the use of violence. *Adam Bede* demonstrates that, as in a state of emergency, the procedural violence by which Hetty is threatened temporarily suspends and functions outside of the community norms it sustains. *Adam Bede's* ultimate ambivalence regarding Hetty Sorrel's fate, and the community of Hayslope's role in Hetty's expulsion, I argue, is indicative of Eliot's anxieties regarding what she saw as violence's fundamental role in maintaining the liberal state. *Adam Bede* does not simply reproduce the scapegoat mechanism, nor does the novel seek merely to demystify its social processes. Rather, in

Adam Bede Eliot emphasizes the "deliberate" and deliberative character of collectivized and procedurally legitimized violence.[3]

[3] Thus my argument opposes that of a seminal work on scapegoating and the nineteenth-century novel, Michiel Heyns's *Expulsion and the Nineteenth-Century Novel: The Scapegoat in English Realist Fiction*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994). Heyns builds his argument, which he extends to works from Austen to Conrad, upon the distinction made by René Girard between texts that unselfconsciously depend on the scapegoat mechanism to achieve closure and those texts that "thematize" the scapegoat mechanism, and therefore "reveal the truth of persecution" See René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. Yvone Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986), 12-23. For Heyns, the modernist or protomodernist works of James and Conrad exemplify the latter category, while the novels of George Eliot, which Heyns argues unconsciously reproduce and depend on the scapegoat mechanism as a means of narrative resolution, are persecution texts *par excellence*. My argument has more in common with Jan-Melissa Schramm's erudite *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative*, which also rests on the Girardian distinction so important to Heyns (31-32). Schramm considers the Victorian novel in terms of its reflexive acknowledgment of persecution and the troubling processes of substitution that inhere in practices of sacrifice and self-sacrifice: "the affect which moves the reader toward the crucial task of moral renewal is often generated by the spectacle of unmerited or excessive suffering" (31). Looking at a wide variety of Victorian texts, including Eliot's novels, Schramm explores the tensions between archaic or vestigial modalities of blood-atonement that coexist with a new, self-fashioning Victorian legal ethics. Schramm sees Eliot's sacrificial dramas as "attempting to treat with justice both the contending impulses of rebellion and conformity" while avoiding "an enormous investment in the conservative status quo" (220). Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Atonement and Self-Sacrifice in Nineteenth-Century Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2012). Also of importance is Ilana M. Blumberg, "'Love Yourself as Your Neighbor': The Limits of Altruism and the Ethics of Personal Benefit in *Adam Bede,*" *Victorian Literature and Culture* 37: (2009) 543-560. Similarly to Schramm (who in fact quotes Blumberg to support her own conclusions), Blumberg argues that Eliot attempts to strike a balance between the elemental needs of the many and those of the individual while at the same time rejecting the Benthamite claim that the good of the whole excuses the suffering of the one (545). Blumberg contends that Eliot's "ethical realism" compelled the novelist to countenance not only the fact that suffering and happiness must coexist in the world, but also the possibility that the joy of some depends precisely on the suffering of others (543-544). Her very smart reading of *Adam Bede* goes against the grain of much Eliot criticism by showing that the "limits" of Eliot's embrace of altruism allow for the emergence of a moral individualism in which "the separation of human lots…must suffice to explain or justify the inequality of the lots of those who benefit," as Adam Bede does in Blumberg's reading, "perhaps guiltily, but not undeservingly" (556). The "separation of human lots" to which Blumberg points allows precisely for the types of disavowal that I'm arguing are part and parcel of the liberal subjectivity's propensity to order its environment, and which are perhaps not distinguishable from those cognitive processes that Eliot herself calls the individual's "apologetic ingenuity" (*Adam Bede* 342).

Heterogeneity and Incommensurability in Adam Bede

Adam Bede's georgic pastoral, centered in the community of Hayslope, enfolds formalized values of impersonality and individual self-sufficiency. Much like the St. Oggs of Eliot's nearly contemporaneous *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), Hayslope's conventions have their roots in a secularized protestant ethic.[4] Adam's failure is "that he had too little fellow-feeling with the weakness that errs in spite of foreseen consequences" (228). Likewise Hayslope "had little pity for want or rags," which it saw as "a mark of idleness and vice" rather than the "cruel inevitable fate such as they sometimes seem in cities" (412). Here Eliot opposes the pastoral to the degraded life of the city in an effort to describe the exclusionary psychology of Hayslope's constituency. But she simultaneously gestures toward the transformation of liberal ideology that, toward the end of the nineteenth century, will depart from *laissez-faire* economic principles and a sacrosanct individualism and become more accepting of a public morality based in notions of altruism and a collective, social welfare.[5] The retrospective world of Hayslope, then, represents a mythic conception of liberalism that (if it ever existed at all) had disappeared by the time Eliot penned *Adam Bede* in 1859, and that for Irene Tucker, "name[s] a condition of subjectivity in which one's capacity to know and predict the contingent particularities of the material world—including the particularities of other people in specific social, political and economic relations to one—becomes the ground of one's operation as an agent" (*Probable State* 25).

Insofar as the operations of "liberal subjectivity" depend on predictability, those operations also rely on relative epistemological homogeneity—that is, a general acquiescence to formalized and shared methodologies oriented toward producing ethical, political, and

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[4] The go to source on George Eliot and the protestant ethic is Alan Mintz, *George Eliot and The Novel as Vocation* (Boston: Harvard UP, 1978).

[5] See my comments above regarding liberalism's internal contradictions, pp. ix-x.

economic understanding (which is not to say a shared understanding per se) and that would have a referential quality for the community. Yet in the more or less heterogeneous social environment of the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century, as Max Weber observed, one can no longer depend on these formalized practices: "the ultimately possible attitudes toward life are irreconcilable, and hence their struggle can never be brought to a final conclusion" (*Essays* 148). Weber's vision of modernity is fundamentally incompatible with the liberal subjectivity of which *Adam Bede's* Hayslope is emblematic. Hayslope's pastoral stability depends on the ease of identity making procedures, which recall, for example, Adam Smith's words regarding the importance of shared "sentiment": "The great pleasure of conversation and society arises from a certain harmony of minds, which like so many musical instruments coincide and keep time with one another" (*Theory* 398). Once Hayslope's putative synchronicity is threatened by what it can not easily identify, the community must either, through forced processes of compromise, subsume the other, or it must exclude the nonsubsumable. These opposed tracks are epitomized in *Adam Bede* by the twinned stories of Dinah Morris and Hetty Sorrel.

Hayslope cannot tolerate the forms of heterogeneity that threaten the harmony of its "pleasant land" (22). The instabilities that increasingly disrupt life in Hayslope mark the problem posed by the irreconcilability of conflicting epistemologies. As Hadley points out, the cognitive attitude that she calls "liberal cognition" is in conflict with the "unpredictable" character of modern democratic society, which, in the second half of the nineteenth century, was perceived as becoming ever more volatile (9-12).[6] To combat this "general disarray," the

[6] The reasons for such volatility, historically speaking, are manifold. The repeal of the Corn Laws (which fueled economic and thus political crisis), the consecutive Reform Bills, and the antagonisms surrounding the populist Chartist movement (to name the major sources of unrest), all contributed to the political volatility of the period. The general anxiety produced

liberal mind seeks an insular, homogenous social and political environment produced through formalized and deliberative cognitive procedures. In other words, the liberal mind so understood requires the regularity that springs from repeated practices, that is, from similarity and formality. The apparent disappearance of this sort of homogeneous social medium by the latter half of the nineteenth century marked a "moment," again in the words of Tucker, "when the liberal subject's capacity to know became no longer adequate to the task of allowing the subject to act freely" (25). Tucker argues that the upshot of this "sudden incapacity" was an expanded statist intervention, and eventually, the individual's increased dependence on the state (25-6). I would add that the increasingly irreconcilable nature of disparate human interests that produced what Carl Schmitt calls the depoliticization of society (by which, again, he in fact means the *mass politicization* of society), and that was at least in part responsible for the change Tucker points to, also resulted in the state's increased dependence on the now disavowed use of exceptional violence. Avowed violence, such as "war" writes Schmitt, "is condemned, but executions, sanctions, punitive expeditions, and [other] measures to ensure peace remain. The adversary is thus no longer called an enemy but a disturber of the peace and is thereby designated to be an outlaw of humanity" (*Concept of the Political* 79).[7]

Meanwhile, these developments are contemporaneous with revised theorizations of liberalism, such as John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*, published in the same year as *Adam Bede*, which postulated the power of a cultivated deliberative rationality to dissolve the age old

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by this sustained turbulence is evident throughout the literature of the nineteenth century, is extremely important to all of Eliot's novels, and is crystallized by Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, a book the title of which might better be rephrased as a hypothetical imperative: If not culture, then anarchy. These instabilities are all symptomatic of the mass politicization of the public sphere that Schmitt sees as precisely antithetical to his "concept of the political."

[7] See also pp. 60-73.

synergy between "Liberty and Authority."[8] However, as Weber suggested, in the face of the modern "struggles" that arise due the irreconcilability of antagonistic but valid world-views, ultimately "it is necessary to make a decisive choice" (148). This is the conception of the world that influences Schmitt's notorious friend/enemy distinction and that warrants the decisionist concept of the exception.[9] My contention is that once faced with the heterogeneity and unpredictability of the full-blown liberal democracy of the late nineteenth century, and once faced with the ultimate erosion of the liberal ideal, the fact of the exception came to exist—however disavowed—as the failsafe of liberal practices. Yet paradoxically the goal of proceduralism is precisely to resolve problems of irreconcilability and produce consensus while avoiding at all costs the necessity of arbitrary decisionism and the exclusion it entails. But *Adam Bede* shows us that consensus has a tendency to ossify and become tradition and subsequently require exclusionary violence for its maintenance. Once consensus is threatened by the erosion of those validity claims to which the community had previously cohered all that remains for tradition is to assert itself repressively, and violently.

The Force of "Established Claims"

Adam Bede's "far-reaching visions of the past" light upon Hayslope, "as it appeared on the eighteenth of June, in the year of our Lord 1799" (9). This is mere months prior to the infamous *18 Brumaire*, the day Napoleon launched his *coup* against the French Directory and proclaimed himself Emperor of France. Eliot published the novel in 1859, some four years after a second Napoleonic uprising in France, this time by Napoleon's nephew, Louis,

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[8] For an excellent discussion of Eliot, Arnold, and the importance of Mill's "many-sidedness" to conceptions of liberalism and rational agency for all three, see Thomas, *Cultivating Victorians* 26-48.

[9] *The Concept of the Political* 27-37. See also Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology* 11-15.

and little more than a decade after the transcontinental revolutions of 1848. As early as in Burke and as late as in Arnold it is clear that the English were deeply concerned through this extended period of unrest that the violence and social instabilities would spread from the continent to the British Isles. The Napoleonic Wars that create the historical scaffolding for Eliot's novel function as a sort of retrospective surrogate for this threatened consciousness, but also work as a focal point for a cohesive localized national sentiment: "Th' war's a fine thing for the country" not only because it keeps the prices of corn high, and as such Hayslope prosperous, but because the antagonism with the mythically "wicked" and effeminate French affords a concrete sense of English identity to the people of Hayslope (569).

Nonetheless, *Adam Bede's* historical background expresses Eliot's own sensitivity to the unrest of the time, as well as its origin in putatively democratic struggles. In one of the novel's odd and ambiguous anachronisms, Eliot compares the formal cognitive processes of the individual to that of her contemporary Europe; retrospective furnishes both with an "apologetic ingenuity": "Europe adjusts itself to a *fait accompli*, and so does the individual character—until the placid adjustment is disturbed by a convulsive retribution" (342). The passage again shows the superimposed temporalities of Eliot's narrative, but also signals that her own retrospective will supply no such apology for the world it depicts. Eliot's historical analogy makes an important point that is applicable not only to her individual characters in *Adam Bede*, but Hayslope as well. Like Hayslope, the individual's desire for harmony excludes from consciousness "any bad consequence that [are] not demonstrably inevitable" (342). Once again Eliot calls our attention to the liberal propensity to harmonize cognitive disjunction through processes of sublimation or disavowal. Yet such forms of self-deception or repudiation carry with them, as the events of *Adam Bede* will demonstrate, what

is for Eliot an inevitable backlash, a "convulsive retribution," from which no party is entirely safe.

At the beginning of *Adam Bede*, however, no such convulsions are evident. Through the early pages of the novel leading up to "The Preaching" chapter, we share the view of "a traveller" who provides a sweeping and picturesque vision of Hayslope and its surroundings (18). In contrast to the "grim outskirt of Stonyshire," the growing industrial community on the margins of Hayslope, a sort of working pastoral is preserved in the still agriculturally "rich, undulating district of Loamshire," with the patrician emblem of the Donnithorne Arms standing "at the entrance of the village" (20; 18).[10] Also preserved is Adam's naturalized "instinctive reverence" for Arthur Donnithorne. As if reflected by the landscape itself, the hierarchies that necessarily organize the social world of Hayslope are for the moment secure: "Adam had the blood of peasants in his veins, and that since he was in his prime half a century ago, you must expect some of his characteristics to be obsolete":

> Adam, I confess, was very susceptible to the influence of rank, and quite ready to give an extra amount of respect to everyone who had more advantages than himself, not being a philosopher, or a proletaire with democratic ideas, but simply a stout limbed clever carpenter with a large fund of reverence in his nature, which inclined him to admit to all established claims unless he saw clear grounds for questioning them. (179)

The reverence of "established claims" stands out here, as so often in Eliot, as a crucial component of social stability as well as of its preservation. Adam in many ways embodies for Eliot that interpenetration of reverence and ameliorative change that she sees (along with

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[10] On the function of landscape in *Adam Bede* see Sarah Gates, "'The Sound of the Scythe Being Whetted': Gender, Genre, and Realism in *Adam Bede,*" *Studies in the Novel* 30.1 (1998): 20-34. Also Mary Jean Corbett, "Representing the Rural: The Critique of Loamshire in *Adam Bede*," *Studies in the Novel* 20.3 (1988): 288-301. Perhaps most important is David Carroll, "*Adam Bede*: Pastoral Theodicies," *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992).

a Georgic sense of vocation) as the necessary qualities of the presumptive middle class.[11] Although Adam's at times rigid insularity is his principal failing, that Eliot admires the practicality with which she has imbued Adam becomes clearer as the passage continues, and Eliot reiterates through the filter of Adam's consciousness the potentially deleterious social effects of the "proletaire with democratic ideas." The narrative allegorizes through Adam's ventriloquized idiom democracy's potential threat to *Bildung*: "he had no theories about setting the world to rights, but he saw there was a great deal of damage to be done by building with ill-seasoned timber—by ignorant men in fine clothes making plans for outhouses and workshops and the like, without knowing the bearing of things" (179). Eliot makes a similar point in a oft-quoted essay written just a few years before *Adam Bede*: "What has grown up historically can only die out historically"; any too rapid change that too drastically "severs" the individual from the "process of development" can do a "great deal of damage" because the "development" of the individual, as well as his "medium," can "take place only through the consentaneous development of both."[12]

Enter Arthur Donnithorne and Hetty Sorrel: the latter knows nothing of reverence, while the weak-willed Arthur cannot act with moderation. The two represent social and economic antipodes, yet will mingle, and by doing so initiate a crisis. "While Arthur gazed into Hetty's dark beseeching eyes, it made no difference what sort of English she spoke, and

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[11] On middle-class ideals in Eliot, see Daniel Cottom, *Social Figures: George Eliot, Social History, and Literary Representation* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1987).

[12] See George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," *George Eliot: Selected Critical Writings*. 260-295. Eliot's novels surely express an anxiety about just what type of ethics is available to the individual in the increasingly expansive modern world, and whether or not moral action, or morality of any sort, is possible outside of the insular and circumscribed world of rapidly disappearing tradition. However, my argument here is that embedded in Eliot's putative nostalgia is a deep skepticism regarding the limits of self-reflexivity and the individual's ability to access the formalized intellectual practices that critics such as Anderson (2001; 2006), Thomas (2004), and Malachuk (2005) tend to valorize.

even if hoops and powder had been in fashion, he would very likely not have been sensible just then that Hetty wanted those signs of high breeding" (144). The world of romance—both sexual and generic—that lies hidden in the Fir-Tree Grove effaces within the romantic dyad all of those class markers still apparent to the reader. The narrator's sexual metaphors emphasize the lovers' putative similitude: they are like "two velvet peaches"; they "mingle as easily as two brooklets that ask for nothing but to entwine themselves" (144). Arthur, as his namesake implies, is here playing his generic—and historical—role as knight/seducer. In *Adam Bede* romance obscures Hetty and Arthur's actual relations.

The pastoral has a similar function in the novel, but with a much wider compass. *Adam Bede* does not recreate nostalgically a historically concrete past, but rather reflects back at its readers an idealized time that exists only mythically. *Adam Bede's* narrative mediates the always-present interplay of separate but corollary periods. The novel's idealized setting at the turn of the nineteenth century is never entirely distinct from the social and political realities of 1859, and least so precisely when the narrative calls our attention to the temporal gap opened by retrospect, as it often does: "Adam was in his prime half a century ago," but nonetheless represents the values of an emergent middle class individualism (179). By projecting contemporary values into the past, and allowing the past to reflect those contemporary values back at the present, Eliot turns the pastoral inside out and shows nostalgia to be something altogether less benign than mere wish fulfillment. Thus in my view George Eliot's "fictions of the recent past" do not, as Elaine Hadley suggests, gesture "nostalgically toward a social consensus" in which forms of sympathetic judgment are aided by the more stable identity making procedures available to the subject in a homogenous social setting (86). Nor does *Adam Bede* uncritically "endorse a vision of a sturdy traditional British nation, subject only to the gradual and consensual changes that will be brought about

by the insights derived from education and experience."[13] Rather, Eliot shows the reader that *Adam Bede's* generic idealizations, what David Carroll has called the novel's "pastoral theodicies," enfold conventional mores of individual self-sufficiency such as those Weber associated with the *certitudo salutis*.[14] Hayslope's secularized faith in its effectual calling is expressed as a hardness and impersonality that short-circuits reflexive understanding. Exhibiting a "strange deadness to the word," Hayslope rejects the interloper Dinah's disconcertingly enthusiastic preaching, even as it will doom the natural and alarmingly sensuous Hetty (101).

At the moment when Adam spies Arthur and Hetty together in the Fir-Tree Grove, Arthur emerges from the wood still imagining himself in an asymmetrical relation to Adam. A few pages earlier at "The Dance," after Hetty drops the locket secretly given her by Arthur, Adam instantly becomes jealous. Not knowing who had given her the locket, he is confounded, "lost in the utter impossibility of finding any person for his fears to light on" (313). He tries to imagine a rival, but cannot conceive of that rival being Arthur because the Donnithorne heir's relation to Hetty and Adam's social sphere renders him ineligible in Adam's mind. Once Adam discovers the lovers, Arthur immediately senses in Adam's "change of tone" that the metaphorical distance between the two has vanished, even as the physical distance is closed in violent conflict (325). In Girardian fashion, the moment of

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[13] Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder & British Culture 1720-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 152. McDonagh argues (more or less in a vein with Raymond Williams (see 17-20 below) and Michiel Heyns (see n. 9 above)) that this recuperative vision of the nation is achieved in *Adam Bede* by a type of formal scapegoating, that is, "through the compulsory forgetting of moments of violent opposition and challenge to national authority" (*Child Murder* 152).

[14] See David Carroll, *George Eliot and the Conflict of Interpretations* 73-105. On the importance of *certitudo salutis* to protestant individualism, and the individual's need for worldly "objective results" to shore up the individual's anxiety regarding his "effectual calling," see Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2002), 64-71.

detection emphasizes the triangular structure of their relations, while Hetty's sudden disappearance "through the gate" reorganizes the scene to underscore the primacy not of the object of desire, but the desire of the rivals.[15] In the run-up to actually trading blows, the two exchange barbs and insults in a reciprocal and intensifying manner. The moment emphasizes the contagious and potentially violent instabilities that arise from this sudden and exaggerated democratization. Coming as it does precisely in the middle of the novel, in a chapter aptly entitled "A Crisis," it is this conflict on which the plot turns. Thus begins the growing crisis that the remainder of *Adam Bede* works to suppress, but that will finally only be resolved by transferring blame to Hetty.

Violence, Incomplete Rationality, and Narrative

By foregrounding the disjunctions between the thought and language of its narrator, the novel's characters and, by extension, the community of Hayslope itself, the narrative of *Adam Bede* brings into relief Hayslope's inability to reflexively or objectively understand the function of violence in sustaining social stability. Eliot attempts to stimulate her reader's own reflective capabilities so that he or she might identify, if not complete, so to speak, the "incomplete rationality" of Hayslope and its constituency.[16] Broadly construed, the ideal of

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[15] René Girard, *Deceit, Desire and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1965) 1-52. Adam and Arthur are paradigmatic mimetic doubles. Though Girard considers rivalry to be a recursive structure in literatures of all ages, he makes a distinction regarding the function of the rival in modern, putatively egalitarian societies. Girard: "If the *modern* emotions flourish, it is not because 'envious natures' and 'jealous temperaments' have unfortunately and mysteriously increased in number, but because *internal* mediation triumphs in a universe where the differences between men are gradually erased" (14).

[16] I borrow this formulation from Yirimiyu Yovel's enlightened reading of Spinoza (who Eliot translated in the early stages of her career, and whose thought was clearly formative for Eliot). Yovel focuses on an important passage from Part 4 of *Ethica* where Spinoza asserts that "we must enumerate and often imagine the common dangers of life, and how they can

rationality refers to the identity of an agent's thoughts, beliefs, and/or actions with the agent's reasons supporting those thoughts belief and/or actions. But if reason is not to be considered pure, or *a priori*, but rather dialogic and intersubjective, then rationality is always in part shaped by the very need to conform to a body of reasons or norms that have a social origin beyond the agent. Because the agent cannot know (and really, cannot be) the origin of the reasons supporting her actions, the identity between thought and action is always in jeopardy and inadequate to the demands of agency.

Incomplete rationality describes the common lot in Eliot. Ideally, the agent calls upon the intersubjective impressions and normative patterns of her world to inform her actions and direct them toward a "right way of living." Yet, as wee see in *Adam Bede*, this is more easily said than done. While Hetty, who "can't find a shape for her expectations," is perhaps the most severe case, we see that she is hardly alone in her inability to reflexively understand the origins of her reasons or actions (148). Eliot shows her reader that, contrary to Anderson and Habermas, speech is not "immanently oriented toward reaching understanding."[17] "Examine your words well," we are told, "and you will find that even

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best be avoided and overcome by presence of mind and fortitude"; "the best we can do…is to conceive a right way of living, i.e. fixed rules of life that are certain…so that our imagination is widely affected by them and they are always at hand." Baruch de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. G. H. R. Parkinson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000) 296. This "incomplete rationality," as Yovel dubs it, is a process by which the "imagination [is] re-configured as an *imitation* of reason." Y. Yovel, "Incomplete Rationality in Spinoza's *Ethics,*" *Spinoza on Reason and the "Free Man,"* eds. Yirmiyahu Yovel and Gideon Segal (New York: Little Room Press, 2004) 15-35. Spinoza, and Yovel, describes formalized processes of reflexive and intersubjective (the "common dangers of life") cognition that are not at all foreign to liberal notions of agency. Eliot's ambivalence concerning these formalized processes, I am arguing, stems from her concerns regarding the efficacy of these methods once they become fixed and formulaic and particularly once faced with the increasing plurality of valid but conflicting points of view.

[17] Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now* 168. Anderson quotes at length from Habermas's *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* in an effort to underwrite her claim that "speech implicitly makes validity claims."

when you have no motive to be false, it is very hard to say the exact truth" (*Adam Bede* 195). And indeed, we see that seemingly innocuous communicative impasses between, first, Dinah and Hetty (Ch. 15) and then between Arthur and Irwine (Ch. 16) in many ways engender the worst tragedies of the novel. Understanding, for Eliot, must be honed "as we learn the art of vision, by a good deal of hard experience, often with bruises and gashes incurred in taking things up by the wrong end, and fancying our space wider than it is" (175). In other words, our methods of knowing are often not adequate to the task of responsible agency, and suffering is the result. For all of the purported stability associated with the realist aesthetic and Eliot's own assertion that she wishes to tell her "simple story," "dreading nothing, indeed, but falsity," she acknowledges that she can hardly avoid providing an "arbitrary picture" (*Adam Bede* 194). As I will show in the next sections, *Adam Bede* seeks to shake our faith in the unavoidably arbitrary normative patterns that, while at times providing much needed guidance for her characters, also finally sways the town Hayslope to believe that its punitive treatment of Hetty Sorrel is justice, and not revenge (194-5).

Adam Bede is ambivalent enough regarding Hetty Sorrel's fate so as to be opaque in its appraisal of it, to the extent that, I think, the reader should be cautious in assigning to the text a definite judgment. However, many critics have done just that. Raymond Williams's influential reading of *Adam Bede* remains indicative of those critics who read Eliot's harsh treatment of Hetty as a sort of political or ethical failure. Williams writes that Hetty remains "a subject to that last moment on the road before she abandons her baby; but after that moment she is an object of confession and conversion" (*The Country and the City* 173). Eliot "abandons" Hetty, according to Williams, "in a moral action more decisive than Hetty's own confused and desperate leaving of her child" (173). For Williams, *Adam Bede's* scapegoating of Hetty placates the "external interests," that result from what he sees as Eliot's "uneasy

contract" with the interests and sensibilities of a "particular kind of reader" (172-3). Williams is perhaps right that the ethics of Eliot's narrator are often in step with those of a particular kind of implied reader, but he is wrong to consider this formulation uncritically. We would be wrong, I think, to equate the ethics of Eliot's narration with Eliot's own or ascribe them to her putative need to placate a "particular kind of reader."

Rather, we should distinguish between a nebulous concept of a Victorian reader whom we identify by potentially misconceived notions of class or morality and the intra-textual reader to whom Eliot so often refers explicitly in the text (and whom she so often specifically identifies by linguistic markers of class, gender, or morality). Neither Eliot's narrative, nor its narrative voices are stable entities; likewise her implied reader is a protean figure. "God preserve you and me from being the beginners of such misery!" exclaims our narrator gravely at the end of Hetty's "Journey in Despair" (*Adam Bede* 423). The words prompt the reader to ask: to whom do the pronouns refer? The answer can only be gleaned from the speech characteristics of the speaker, whose explicitly male voice is directed to an explicitly male implied reader; only a man, such as Arthur, and evidently our narrator, could be a "beginner" of the type of misery Hetty experiences.[18] Yet, what about Hetty? Immediately prior to the narrator's exclamatory address to the reader, Hetty is described as "clinging to life only as the hunted wounded brute clings to it" (423). The proximity of the two utterances creates a disjunction that broaches concerns about agency and responsibility: the narrator seems chiefly concerned with avoiding the imputation of responsibility, rather than with Hetty's misery, or what unnamed force compels her to cower and hide like a "hunted and wounded" animal. His character and sense of propriety recoils from any social

[18] See Gillian Beer's important discussion of how Eliot genders her narrators in Gillian Beer, "Putting on Man's Apparel: The Early Fiction" in *George Eliot* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986), 59-81.

association or involvement with Hetty's "despair," rather than from Hetty's despair as such. Elaine Hadley has cogently summed up the all-important Victorian category of "character": "A midcentury liberal individual is a man of character, and a man of character is a midcentury liberal individual" (6-7). It is precisely this fetishized category of character that Eliot puts under pressure here and at various other points in the novel. Instead of merely reproducing and prioritizing the "frank sensibility of the isolated moral observer," as Raymond Williams argues, here Eliot critiques the narrator's incomplete moral sensibility (180). These narrative ambivalences work to dilate the reflective capacity of her reader such that the reader's understanding might encompass the contradictions embedded in the errant forms of rationality that motivate feeling and action in *Adam Bede.*

The narrator, while often displaying omniscient powers as well as a putative detachment from the situations and characters he assesses, is shown in these passages as never free from the common prejudices that narrow human perception and understanding. This is a crucial point for Eliot: meaning exists only in social interaction, and meaning is necessarily conditioned by the inherent distortions that inflect understanding between individuals. Even "the strongest effort to avoid any arbitrary picture, and to give a faithful account of men and things," Eliot allows, "is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused" (193). Eliot asserts the unavailability of the abstract, impartial moral perspective on which forms of Kantian liberal procedure depend for judgment. Ironically, Eliot's critique of impartiality strikes at the heart of what is generally seen as the realist novel's locus of consensus building objectivity—the narrator. In a recent work, Pericles Lewis has rehearsed precisely the vision of the novel Eliot seeks to undermine: "The functioning of the novelistic universe depends on the narrator's role as neutral arbiter. He stands aloof from the characters and disentangles their competing claims

and perceptions. Like the state in liberal political thought, he acts as the guarantor of the shared social reality" (9). But as Eliot shows in *Adam Bede*, there is no escaping the prejudices that jaundice perspective and as a result skew judgment. For this reason the utterances internal to the novel should not be taken for the authoritative word of George Eliot, nor should they be read as the voice of a single law-giving narrator. Rather these discourses should be evaluated critically, for such linguistic relationships invariably model potentially "confused" or "defective" points of view, which Eliot sets before the reader in an effort to spur reflexive understanding. Eliot's sacrificial theme is meant to question precisely the moral obtuseness of Williams's "particular kind of reader," who would countenance and, by doing so, passively sanction the ethical contradictions made apparent by Hetty's fate at the hands of her community.

Consequently *Adam Bede's* "punitive ending" is not, I think, to be associated with the author's effort to reflect and conform to Victorian values embedded in a rural retrospect. Neither does Hetty's scapegoating represent the uncritical implementation by George Eliot of a means of aesthetic and moral resolution. Yet this is precisely the stance of Michiel Heyns's *Expulsion and the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, perhaps the most influential work on scapegoating in the Victorian novel. Heyns's argument derives from René Girard's distinction between texts that unselfconsciously depend on the scapegoat mechanism to achieve closure and those texts that "thematize" the scapegoat mechanism and therefore "reveal the truth of persecution."[19] For Heyns, the modernist or protomodernist works of James and Conrad exemplify the latter category, while he argues that the earlier nineteenth-century novels uncritically reproduce the scapegoat mechanism as a means of narrative resolution and thus epitomize the former. As for Raymond Williams before him, Heyns

[19] See René Girard, *The Scapegoat* 12-23.

understands Hetty Sorrel to be unreflectively "reduced to a pathetic victim of Eliot's moral purpose" (*Expulsion* 31). This is so, according to Heyns, because "in Eliot the pressure toward scapegoating is stronger than the counterpressure" against its use as a means of both aesthetic and moral resolution (39). Hetty's fate is as such paradigmatic of what Heyns sees as Eliot's principal artistic conundrum: her inability to resolve in her fiction that "inherent contradiction between the realist claim to be rendering an external reality, and its concern with an ethical dispensation of the universe" (39). Here Heyns recasts the epistemological dilemma of liberalism that, as we saw earlier, Pericles Lewis had promoted as a problem of shared understanding and that he had argued is resolved through the consensus building procedures of the realist novel. Heyns is right to point to the scapegoating process as another means of both novelistic and political closure and is also correct that in *Adam Bede* violence and expulsion provide the impetus for resolution and consensus formation in the fictional community of Hayslope. However, he is mistaken, I feel, that George Eliot presents this process unreflectively. Instead, as I have been arguing, the novel reproduces what George Eliot sees as a seminal contradiction of liberalism: that liberal procedure depends on what might be called a crypto-decisionism. As Eliot made clear in her *Antigone and its Moral*, "the antagonism of valid claims" that she had identified as the "exquisite art of Sophocles['s]" play, persists in the social and political arrangements of every age (*Critical Writings* 245-246). Because of the conflict intrinsic to political incommensurability, it is impossible to "attain a great right without also doing a wrong" (*Critical Writings* 246). This is so, because ultimately it is impossible to avoid some sort of arbitrary decision in order to induce resolution. It is a pointed sense of this contradiction that George Eliot extends to her critique of liberal consensus formation and liberal procedure in *Adam Bede*. Because the decision is precisely antithetical to the *raison d'être* of liberal procedure, proceduralism must

disavow its reliance on forms of arbitrary violence. Eliot's novel does not accuse; it implicates, not only itself and its own generic needs, but also its readers, both implied and "actual." By "abandoning" Hetty, Eliot's narrative formally replicates her intense isolation from Hayslope. This allows Hetty's story to be assembled by the very people—her community members—who demand her sacrifice for and, so to speak, in the presence of the reader. The narrative argues its case against Hetty and builds the moral consensus required for punitive action. Hetty's confession, as we will see, will then undercut the narrative that Eliot has allowed to play out over the course of the chapters leading up to Hetty's climactic scene with Dinah in order to emphasize the community's role as persecutor.

The Sacred and the Profane

As Mr. Poyser's orphaned "penniless niece," Hetty Sorrel is from the start an outsider to Hayslope. Yet at the same time, included as she is within the respected and hardworking Poyser family, she is also of the community. A number of critics rightly associate Hetty with the pastoral: David Carroll writes, "she is the natural, instinctively self-seeking in its own pleasure, the quintessence of the pastoral, nature in all 'its self engrossed loveliness'" (76). Sarah Gates goes so far as to say "Hetty *is* the landscape" (24). Yet like Adam, Hetty's character instantiates the values of putatively conflicting periods. Hetty's unearned ambition and her blatant disregard for those human relations that Eliot sees as the foundations of community and culture associate her with the negative forms of detachment Eliot depicts as symptomatic of a retrograde modernity: Hetty has "hardly any roots" (169). Though simplistic and naturally unreflective, in her insatiable vanity and ambition Hetty carries within her the germ of her albeit more calculating relations Rosamond Vincy and Gwendolen Harleth. As George Levine pointed out in a now venerable essay, the "egoisms"

that in Eliot lead to an exaggerated individualism "isolate man from his natural ties" ("Determinism" 272). And there is perhaps no character in all of Eliot who is, finally, more completely severed from her "natural ties" than Hetty Sorrel. Like the dogs and children to which she is so often compared, Hetty is domesticated, able to live within the family and community, yet unable to access the full and reciprocal value of human relations or understand the significance of those relations, which Eliot called the "vital elements" of culture, "which bind men together and give a higher worthiness to their existence" (*Letters* 471-472).

When she recognizes she is pregnant, Hetty's narcissism rapidly changes to fear, a fear that Eliot's narrative lingers over expressly to emphasize the social character of her dread: "She must hide herself where no familiar eyes could detect her" (397).

> She could never endure that shame before her uncle and aunt, before Mary Burge, and the servants at the Chase, and the people of Broxton, and everybody who knew her. They should never know what happened to her. She shrank from that idea…as she might have shrunk from scorching metal. Where should she go? What *could* she do? (413)

This is a precise inversion of an earlier passage:

> They are but dim ill-defined pictures that her narrow bit of an imagination can make of the future; but of every picture she is the central figure in fine clothes; Captain Donnithorne is very close to her, putting his arm around her, perhaps kissing her, and everybody else is admiring and envying her—especially Mary Burge, whose new print dress looks very contemptible by the side of Hetty's resplendent toilette. (168)

Rather than gazing on in admiration, once Hetty knows she is pregnant, the eyes of "Hetty's World" now stare with a persecutorial intent. Hetty recoils from her community as from "scorching fire" (414). As what must now be considered absolutely incommensurate with the pastoral Hayslope, Hetty recognizes the suffering that waits for her on the immediate horizon. The "swift-advancing shame," driven upon Hetty is the intersubjective weight of moral consensus, forcing her expulsion from Hayslope even prior to the community's

knowledge of her "Hidden Dread." The comparison of Hetty to a "foolish lost lamb" underscores her association with the sacrificial, even as the image of Hetty "wandering farther and farther in the nightfall on the lonely heath" marks her as scapegoat (395).

The "Hidden Dread" chapter specifically initiates Hetty's importance to the scapegoat theme, which will begin in earnest with Hetty's journey into a "new wilderness" (411). However, the motif of sacrifice is broached forcefully very early on in the novel. As Dinah preaches on the Green of Hayslope, trying to bring "home to the people their guilt," she reenacts Christ's passion story. Her sermon excoriates the village folk's evident indifference to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross:

> See the print of the nails on his dear hands and feet. It is your sins that made them! Ah! How pale and worn he looks! He has gone through all the great agony…They spat upon him and buffeted him, they scourged him, they mocked him, they laid the heavy cross on his bruised shoulders. They nailed him up. Ah! what pain!...with those lips he prays for them, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' Then a horror of great darkness fell on him and he felt what sinners feel when they are forever shut out from God. That was the last drop in the cup of bitterness…All this he bore for you! For you… (35)

Dinah's exegesis of the Passion story underscores emphatically *Adam Bede's* thematization of sacrifice and forecasts proleptically the community's role in the sacrificial drama with which Hetty's narrative will culminate: "'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." However Dinah's preaching has little effect on the "village mind," which "does not easily take fire," and she later complains to the conspicuously secular Rector Irwine that "there's a strange deadness to the Word" in Hayslope (101). The town cleaves to an ideology of individual and domestic self-sufficiency, of rational responsibility, which Eliot associates with its sense of pastoral and economic ease (again epitomized by Irwine). But this ease depends on a surface composure that belies a deep concern with public propriety. For this reason, much in the same way that the community is disconcerted by Hetty's natural beauty, Hayslope is also deeply troubled by Dinah's religious enthusiasm.

Hayslope cleaves to an ideology of individual and domestic self-sufficiency, of rational responsibility, which Eliot associates with its sense of pastoral and economic ease. But even as the imagined social impact of Hetty's actions precipitates her flight from Hayslope, the actual knowledge of her transgression begins to produce apparent instabilities in Hayslope. News of Hetty's arrest creates an immediate sense of isolation for the Poyser family—one that, as for Hetty, is also expressed as a desire to avoid community scorn. Meanwhile, as the truth of Hetty's flight is gradually revealed to Adam, the rivalry between Adam and Arthur grows in intensity. As "The Trial" approaches and as Arthur becomes proximally nearer to the community (having been called home by the Squire's pending death), Adam's aggression, his desire for revenge, becomes increasingly fierce. Irwine sees the danger of Adam's intensifying desire for retribution:

> evil spreads as necessarily as a disease. An act of vengeance on your part against Arthur would simply be another evil added to those we are suffering under: as long as you do not see that to fix on Arthur's punishment is revenge, and not justice, you are in danger of being led on to the commission of some great wrong. (461)

Irwine's brief slip into the plural pronoun indicates the community aspect of the "evil" under which "we are suffering." Even if he is able to view the immediate rivalry of Adam and Arthur with some objectivity, Irwine is incapable of recognizing his own complicity with the greater population's desire for vengeance. Though many have assumed Irwine to be a moral paragon, even the voice of Eliot, we see in these passages, as with the narrator's voice earlier, that Irwine's reflective powers are incomplete. He poses the proper questions, but does not possess the expansive critical understanding necessary to arrive at the most adequate answers. To improve upon Irwine's reflective capacity is left by Eliot to the reader. For Irwine's words broach in precise terms the contradiction inherent to the drama of sacrifice, that is, the inevitable conflation of justice and vengeance: if each is violent, and both function through violence, what then is the distinction between a legal or holy violence

and an illegitimate or unholy violence that the former is used to oppose? At least in this case, how is justice not revenge?

As both clergyman and magistrate Irwine should be in a unique position to understand and respond to this contradiction, but instead he embodies the contradiction itself, or rather, he instantiates the symbiotic relationship of violence and the sacred. Irwine's shortcomings reveal the power of the exception even as they illuminate the processes by which it is communally disavowed. Irwine warns Adam: "It is not for men to apportion the shares of moral guilt and retribution" (460). He then continues, "the evil consequences that may lie folded in a single act of selfish indulgence, is a thought so awful that it ought surely to awaken some feeling less presumptuous than a rash desire to punish" (460). The passage's structural irony foregrounds Irwine's incomplete rationality, but more importantly emphasizes the contradiction immanent to the procedural legitimation of violence. What is absolutely proscribed to the person is sacrosanct for the polity. The normative stability that ultimately creates the conditions for procedural rationality, Eliot shows the reader, finally depends upon the power of the exception not only to safeguard that stability, but to secure it in the first place. This is the same paradox that inheres in Schmitt's brutal dictum from *Political Theology*, which states the "Sovereign is he who decides the exception" (5). The rule of law, or the order that law is meant to preserve, hinges fundamentally on a decisive act that ultimately exists beyond the rule of law. For despite the jury's deliberations, in the case of Hetty's death sentence, and the jury's exceeding arbitrary choice to not recommend mercy, Eliot emphasizes that these deliberations end only in a "moment of decision," when the jury "comes to their decision" (473-4).

In an effort to ward off the spread of violence, emblematized in *Adam Bede* by Adam's increasing desire for vengeance, men institutionalize their need to "apportion

retribution," whether in a religious or juridical form, precisely in order to mitigate the "rash desire to punish" from spreading like a contagion through the community that the institution is intended to protect. The inherent contradiction between justice and revenge, then, is resolved only through what Émile Durkheim calls the "absolute" and incorruptible character of the distinction between "the sacred and the profane" (53). This distinction is evident in the strange consensus that subtends the transcendental nature of the putatively secularized legal institution. The institution's sacred character both creates and is simultaneously created by this consensus, which, as we see with Irwine, simply *discerns* the "absolute" difference between vengeance and justice—as Durkheim says, "the mind irresistibly refuses to allow the two corresponding things to be confounded" (55).[20] Much the way Durkheim describes the absolute incommensurability of the sacred, for Schmitt, "the exception is that which cannot be subsumed" (*Political Theology* 13).[21]

"Only by opting for a sanctified, legitimate form of violence and preventing it from becoming the object of disputes and recriminations," writes René Girard, "can the system save itself from the vicious circle of revenge" (*Violence and the Sacred* 24). The sanctification of violence only occurs due to "the transcendental quality of the system, acknowledged by all" (*Violence and the Sacred* 24). The self-sustaining, but also self-perpetuating character of the relationship between institution and community is apparent—there is on the one hand no difference at all between the two, while on the other hand the sacrilization of the one makes their distinction absolutely polar. Yet the sacred cannot come into being without the violent exception. The covenant between the sacred institution and the community does not

[20] Durkheim continues, "the sacred principle is nothing more nor less than society transfigured and personified."
[21] On the absolute and incommensurable character of the sacred, see Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* 37-41.

function, does not exist, in the absence of the victim; indeed, the sacrificial ritual produces the sacred. Moreover, the victim represents the distinction between the profane and the sacred by being both simultaneously: Hetty Sorrel exemplifies this paradox *par excellence*.

Crypto-decisionism in Adam Bede

As the novel progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that Hetty is not punished solely, or even primarily, for murdering her child.[22] Hetty is punished for the growing ills of the community "crisis," of which her act is merely the most terrible symptom. By gesturing toward an ambiguous "evil which we are suffering under," Irwine alludes to a much broader cognitive disturbance among the community. Though it may be difficult for the modern reader of *Adam Bede* to judge, relative to the idyllic norms of Hayslope, the town is rather shattered by the fallout from Arthur and Hetty's tryst. Early in the novel, the pastoral world of Hayslope is static, picturesque:

> against the horizon huge conical masses of hill; not distant enough to be clothed in purple mystery, but with somber greenish sides visibly specked with sheep, whose motion was only revealed by memory, not detected by sight; wooed from day to day by the changing hours, but responding with no change in themselves. (22)

The events of the novel, however, compromise the pastoral constancy of Hayslope. Hayslope's relative convulsions are perhaps best measured by the sudden and increased mobility around the community of Hayslope. The Poysers respond to shame in the same way as Hetty, and the narrator's use of the same metaphors used to describe Hetty's earlier perceptions indicate that we should understand them in similar terms. "Ah, there's no

[22] I have no room here to contend with the important historical (not to mention mythical or religious) significance of acts of infanticide to *Adam Bede*. However, excellent accounts exist. Among these is the aforementioned Josephine McDonagh, *Child Murder and British culture 1720-1900*. Also, see Christine L. Krueger, "Literary Defenses and Medical Prosecutions: Representing Infanticide in Nineteenth-Century Britain" *Victorian Studies* 40.2 (1997): 271-294.

staying i' this country for us now," says Mr. Poyser, in response to a "scorching sense of disgrace" for which they blame Hetty unequivocally: "She's made our bread bitter to us, for all our lives to come" (449-50).

However, Poyser blames Arthur, not Hetty, for "poisoning [Adam's] life," and resigns himself to the fact that Adam too must leave Hayslope: "as it's much if he can stay i' this country any more nor we can" (450). Poyser is in a sense correct; Adam is poisoned by his desire for revenge, a desire that, as Irwine recognizes, has the potential for poisoning others. Indeed, in "The Dance" chapter, Adam's discovery that he has a rival precipitates the envy and jealousy that "poisoned for ever" that day that had been so full of "promise to him" (313). In the very next chapter, just before he and Arthur come to blows, Adam condemns Arthur for "poisoning" Hetty's life (327). Hetty's "short poisonous delights" with Arthur had "spoiled forever" her ability to enjoy the simple offerings of Haylsope (365). Similarly the "web of folly" that Hetty "spins" with Arthur is compared to "a rancorous poisoned garment" (274). That Adam's potentially contagious "passion" for revenge is capable of "spreading as a disease," is perhaps most indicative of the community's need to dispel the source of the contagion. However, though *Adam Bede* clearly associates Arthur, not Hetty, as the root cause of the contagion, it will nonetheless be Hetty who bears the burden: Hetty represents Hayslope's sickness, and its cure.[23] Again Hetty takes on a double character: She is at once the sacred and profane, the cure and the poison, the savior and the criminal.

Schmitt writes that the exception "is analogous to the miracle in theology (*Political*

[23] See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* 95. Girard points out that the Greek concept of the *pharmakoi*, the word describing the ritual of scapegoating itself, means both "poison and the antidote for poison, both sickness and cure."

Theology 3).[24] Though this arbitrary and thus irrational aspect of the exception is antithetical to the secular, deliberative nature of procedural rationality, Eliot nonetheless emphasizes the theological character of the proceedings throughout the prison, trial, and verdict chapters. The trial is held during the "Lent assizes," a time of penitence and sacrifice in preparation for the commemoration of Christ's crucifixion and subsequent Resurrection. On "The Eve of the Trial," Irwine meets with Adam and Bartle Massey in "an upper room," meant to invoke the events of the Last Supper (457). Eliot has the actual trial and verdict scenes conducted in the ruins of a Gothic hall, "variegated with the tints of old painted glass" (468). Before reading the verdict, the "judge puts on his black cap," signifying the severity of the sentence, as simultaneously the "chaplain in his canonicals was observed behind him" (474). Here Eliot illuminates the syncretization of violence and legal procedure that can only occur under the auspices of the sacred.

In the crucial "The Verdict" chapter the reaction of the crowd as it awaits Hetty Sorrel's judgment again underscores the sacred character of the proceedings. Stilled instantly by an ominous "knock" that "fell as a signal for silence on every ear," the narrator observes, "it is sublime—that sudden pause of a great multitude, which tells that one soul moves in them all" (474-5). There is a moment of palpable indecision prior to the decisive judgment; the "sudden pause" registers the deferral that is often seen as the hallmark of proceduralism, even as the sense of suspension the "pause" communicates works as an index of the sacred. "The counsel and attorneys talking with an air of cool business" ought to be foreign to the proceedings, given Eliot's theological characterization of the events, but instead we see that the secular rationality they emblematize is in fact entirely commensurate with the ritual to

[24] Schmitt argues that "all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," and that the theological underpinnings of the modern State have been disavowed by the "rationalism" of Post-Enlightenment political thinking.

which they ostensibly stand opposed (473). Eliot exposes "the great multitude['s]" dependence on a collective resistance to reflection and reflexive understanding that occludes the ethical contradictions of the scapegoating process. And by describing the crowd's consensual actions and emotions as "sublime," Eliot broaches the concept's association, in the Kantian tradition, with the cathartic force that inheres in the recognition of our power over what is fearful to us.[25] Feeling the "negative pleasure" that Kant describes as the aesthetic sense of the sublime, we find that Adam himself experiences a "shuddering horror" in the moments just prior to the decision (473).[26]

There is a deep connection between the cathartic function of the Kantian sublime and the exclusionary procedures of liberal subjectivity. Faced with what is fearful, unformed, or that which is generally beyond the subject's rational capacity of understanding, the mind first recoils, but then finds a thrilling harmony in its own "ideas of reason."[27] And inherent in the subjective experience of the sublime for Kant is a claim for universal validity of moral feeling. In the experience of the sublime, subjective feeling is abstracted from the particularities of self and is thus impartial in a moral sense: "the Sublime prepares us to esteem something highly, even in opposition to our own (sensible) interest."[28] The feeling of the sublime for Kant is bound to a normative moral claim that has nothing to do with the object and everything to do with the judgment itself, which, uninhibited in any way by anything external to the mind, can make a claim to moral universality. But for Eliot, the crowd's "sublime" response exemplifies the consensus making powers of ritual violence.

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[25] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 129.
[26] Ibid 129.
[27] Ibid 128.
[28] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluher (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987) 134

Here the function of the sublime reveals the drive to domination and self-preservation inherent in reason.[29] In this way the "sublime pause" exposes the violent nonidentity of reason and rational thought that Theodor Adorno tracks back to Kant's moral philosophy (but that one could certainly trace to Spinoza's notion of *conatus*): "on the one hand, reason cannot be separated from the interest in preserving one's own life because reason is really the identity of the self-preserving subject, while on the other hand, reason should be able to oppose the interests of self-preservation" (*Problems of Moral Philosophy* 94).

Nonidentity characterizes the contradiction between justice and exclusionary violence in *Adam Bede*. According to Schmitt, "the state suspends the law in the exception on the basis of its right of self-preservation" (*Political Theology* 12). Kant attempts to resolve the contradiction of the decision by universalizing the conative drive and thereby negating incommensurability: the moral agent must act *as if* his or her actions conformed to a universal law. The same is true of the state. Procedural rationality, too, wants to ground action in universal law, but tries to dispense with the merely formal nature of those laws by establishing their authority in putatively intersubjective consensus making procedures. But communicative reason, which Anderson describes as the "foundation of democratic proceduralism,"[30] does not curtail the force of Adorno's critique: self-preservation is not negated, but only amplified by a consensual rationality that functions as a hypostatized force set over against whatever it deems hostile to itself, as is the case in *Adam Bede*. Procedure as a collective and intersubjective effort to bridge the impasse between the particular and the universal, even in the form of a "regulative ideal" rather than an "empirical reality," [31] can only do so by expelling the interests of the particular, the personal, or the parochial. So

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[29] Ibid 145.
[30] Amanda Anderson, *The Way We Argue Now* 168.
[31] Ibid 186, 178.

rather than acting from a moral standpoint, procedural law is involved in what Carl Schmitt called a "huge cloak and dagger drama," meant to obscure its reliance on the arbitrary decision (*Political Theology* 38). In an effort to obviate any external dependence on the decision, liberal forms of procedure finally only internalize and disavow this dependence on what we can understand as a sort of crytpto-decisionism. In *Adam Bede*, George Eliot discloses to the reader what Habermas himself has called the "exclusionary mechanism" that, though disavowed, nonetheless haunts the procedural rationality critical to sustaining the liberal state.[32]

The Word and the Sword

"The Hidden Dread" chapter initiates Hetty into *Adam Bede's* exclusionary plot, but also presents one of several interpolations in the novel in which the narrator materializes as a spatially embodied commentator, rather than the omniscient "narrator as nobody" that Elizabeth Ermarth suggests secures "the genial consensus of realist narration" (65). For Ermarth the omniscient narrator is an aesthetic and moral response to the insecurities associated with humanist values in the nineteenth century (67). Though Ermarth does not overtly politicize what she sees as the realism's aspirations toward shared understanding, a number of critics have done just that, and it has now become rather standard to envision the realist novel as reflecting a conception of society commensurate with nineteenth-century liberalism.[33] *Adam Bede*, in my view, troubles this conception of the novel. At several points

[32] Habermas, "Concluding Remarks," *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT, 1992) 475-476. When asked pointedly about the "necessity of implicit violence against those who don't accept consensus," Habermas remarks "every public sphere I know of still depends on violence" (475).

[33] Generally speaking this sort of politicization travels in two opposite directions. The first tack would be that of more recent neoliberal scholarship in which the dialogisms of the

the novel presents the narrator as individualized in both time and space and also shows the narrator's understanding to be limited by common and identifiable prejudices. Similar to the novel's presentation of Irwine, *Adam Bede* demonstrates the narrator's incomplete rationality. By doing so Eliot works to undermine the ideals of abstract impartiality and detachment on which liberal procedures are based.

While the narrator's fireside chat with an older Adam Bede in Chapter 17 is perhaps the most notable example of his propensity to materialize within the diegetic frame of the novel, "The Hidden Dread" chapter also offers an interesting instance in the novel, which is associated specifically with Hetty's exclusion from Hayslope. As Hetty sets off for Treddlestone, the pastoral beauty of the landscape through which she travels apparently overcomes the narrator, provoking an anomalous meditation on its picturesque beauty. The reverie, which is crucially opposed in tone to the narrative's initiation of Hetty's journey in despair, is suddenly interrupted by a seemingly unwonted memory:

> What a glad world this looks like, as one drives or rides along the valleys and over the hills! I have often thought so when, in foreign countries, where the fields and woods have looked to me like our English Loamshire—the rich land tilled with just as much care, the woods rolling down the gentle slopes to the green meadows—I have come on something by the roadside which has reminded me that I am not in Loamshire: an image of a great agony—the agony of the Cross. (394-5)

In *Adam Bede* the pastoral throws a veil over the relations that create human suffering. For this reason one must be ever vigilant, because

> hidden among the sunny fields and behind the blossoming orchards...the sound of the gurgling brook, if you came close to one small spot behind a bush, would be mingled for your ear with a despairing human sob. (395)

"Hidden" as it is, Hetty's "despairing human sob" reveals man's own need to render

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novel function by narrative means to imagine the workings of communicative rationality. For an example, see Amanda Anderson's excellent, *The Powers of Distance*. The opposite tack would be that taken by earlier scholars inspired by Althusser and Foucault, such as I have discussed in my introduction.

unintelligible what is antipathetic to his harmony of mind. And although Hetty's pregnancy is undoubtedly her "Hidden Dread," certainly the title of the chapter also references Hetty herself, who is "hidden behind the apple-blossoms" as she fearfully seeks to evade the inevitable persecution that approaches with her "swift-advancing shame." Though "such things" as human agony "are sometimes hidden among the sunny fields and blossoming orchards," the "agony of the cross" is a "reminder" not merely that there is suffering in the world but, as Dinah has pointed out to the community in her reprisal of the Passion story, that "we" are the authors of that suffering (395). The cross stands as a not very subtle reminder of the redemptive power with which theological narratives imbue sacrifice and suffering. However, the cross is not merely a symbol of man's primordial guilt, but also stands as a rebuke of the doctrine of *sole fide* that forms the core of the unreflective, secularized Protestant individualism that informs the public morality of *Adam Bede*. For the Cross is not to be found on the roadside in "our English Loamshire," but rather will only be encountered in "foreign countries." As a particularized, material reminder of human suffering, the cross shakes the narrator's faith in his own harmonious construction of the world and disturbs the equanimity secured by the disavowal of human suffering on which—as the Cross reminds us—that equanimity depends.

Eliot's novel will finally not brook the proclivity for disavowal that the novel presents as a principal mode of liberal cognition, and that the novel repeatedly associates with the pastoral. As I have tried to show, in *Adam Bede* violence transfers responsibility to the one, even as punitive action absolves the community both of its complicity in the initial transgression, as well as the final act of scapegoating. The question, in *Adam Bede*, is not one of guilt, for there is little question that Hetty committed a crime. The problem Eliot poses is one of responsibility and, as such, of agency: Could Hetty have done otherwise? Surely, but

would she have known what she was doing and why she was doing it anymore than when she abandoned her child? The answer is finally unclear, but what is clear, I think, is that Hetty's outward determination is hardly, as George Levine asserted, "ethically irrelevant" ("Determinism and Responsibility" 273). Hetty's crime ultimately is a product of that "transcendental homelessness" that Georg Lukács equates with the individual's plight in modernity: "the homelessness of an action in the human order of social relations, the homelessness of a soul in the ideal order of a supra-personal system of values" (*Theory* 62).

Hetty represents an extreme case of incomplete rationality. She is woefully unreflective, and "quite uneducated" (110). After all, "Hetty had never read a novel; if she had even ever seen one, the words…would have been too hard for her; how then could she find a shape for her expectations?" (148). Hetty's inability to shape her expectations, most notably in a fashion that would conform to the specifics of her determination, is indeed the problem. Theories of rational agency generally assume the existence of a common grammar by which constituents intersubjectively mold the terms of their social relations. This type of consensus is the only means by which person and polity can adjudicate the reasons that support the appropriateness of certain actions. Moreover, the agent must have the capacity to deliberate reflectively among the reasons affecting any choice of action. Clearly, Hetty meets none of these criteria: How then is Hetty to have equal access to community and its laws, as she is given privileged access to its vengeance?

The answer is that she cannot. For this reason, perhaps despite ourselves, we feel sympathy for Hetty. Far more egregiously than Maggie Tulliver, Hetty is unprepared with "knowledge of the irreversible laws within and without her which, governing the habits, becomes morality" (*The Mill on the Floss* 300). There is no place in Hayslope for Hetty, as is there is none in St. Oggs for Maggie. Contrary to these earlier examples of her fiction,

Eliot's later novels will attempt to fashion a reality of meaningful compromise. In the "Finale" of *Middlemarch* (1871) for example, Eliot hesitantly accepts this new medium, as well as the specific forms of heroism that are to be found in the active engagement with that "involuntary, palpitating life" of which she is a constituent (788). Dorothea is "absorbed into the life" of Will Ladislaw, even as her actions are diffused "for the growing good of the world" (*Middlemarch* 836, 838). What cannot be ignored, however, is that whatever benefit Dorothea's diffused agency might bring to posterity, that benefit comes only at a premium, the price for advancement being that the "strength" of Dorothea's "full nature" must be "broken" in the process. Thus compromise also depends on a sort of violence. *Middlemarch's* dialectical vision of social and individual development is indicative of Eliot's Hegelian vision of consensus evinced in her "Notes on Form in Art" (1868), an essay written almost ten years after *Adam Bede*, and during the time in which she composed *Middlemarch*. "'Consensus,'" suggests Eliot, "expresses that fact in a complex organism by which no part can suffer increase or diminution without a participation of all other parts in the effect produced and a consequent modification of the organism as a whole" (*Critical Writings* 358).[34] Yet in the earlier novels, such as *The Mill on the Floss* or *Adam Bede*, no such "consequent modification" is made by the social whole in order to accommodate what it deems as extraneous "parts."

On the penultimate page of the novel Adam tells his brother Seth, "there's no rule so

[34] For an informative discussion of the import of consensus in Eliot, and also the relation of Eliot's vision to Comte, Spencer, and Mill, see Susan Graver, *George Eliot and Community* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984) 150-155. However, Graver conspicuously omits the importance of Hegel (and Spinoza) to Eliot's thinking on consensus. On another note, it is significant that the brilliantly sketchy "Notes on Form in Art" appeared roughly ten years after *Adam Bede* was published in 1859, and a mere three years prior to the publication of *Middlemarch* in 1871, and was as such more or less contemporaneous with her efforts on *Middlemarch*.

wise but what it's a pity for somebody or other" (589). Adam's doubts here articulate the novel's ambivalences, not only as these pertain to Hetty's fate, but also more generally regarding the ethics of profiting by another's suffering.[35] Still, Eliot chooses to express these ambivalences via a legal idiom, and indeed the novel is troubled to its very end by its treatment of Hetty. For Hetty is only "saved" in the "The Last Moment" so that she may be transported and, upon the expiration of the eight-year term of her sentence, die aboard a ship while trying to return to England. Thus Hetty's presence hangs over, so to speak, the hundred or so pages between her transportation and the novel's "Epilogue," when Dinah tells us "the death of the poor wanderer, when she was coming back to us, has been sorrow upon sorrow" (589). These pages, and the considerable time that has elapsed within the frame of the novel, work toward achieving the novel's conventional ending. But as Hayden White argues, "where there is ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the status of the legal system, the ground on which any closure of a story one might wish to tell [either] fictional or factual is lacking" (*Content of the Form* 14). And the details of Hetty's protracted demise haunt *Adam Bede's* efforts at closure from a vestigial remove, suggesting Eliot's deep irresolution about the conventions—social, political, and aesthetic—that have demanded Hetty's expulsion.

For if the events of Hetty's trial and sentencing reveal that liberal legal procedure ultimately depends on an arbitrary and violent decision of the type that Carl Schmitt compares to "a miracle in theology," then no event communicates the arbitrary nature of the "deliberate" decision against Hetty more than the equally arbitrary, in fact miraculous,

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[35] Ilana Blumberg argues persuasively that in *Adam Bede* Eliot attempts to strike a balance between the elemental needs of the many and those of the individual, and that she rejects the Benthamite claim that the good of the whole excuses the suffering of the one. See Blumberg 559-560.

retraction of this death sentence at "The Last Moment." For many readers of the novel, Eliot's punishment of Hetty is imposed on the text as a means of negating the threat to community norms; her expulsion spirits away moral contradiction, as it were, through generic convention and the sovereign intervention of the author. What these critics are responding to is the decision itself, which is inscribed within the generic language of the novel. But if we change our perspective and look at this function of the novel in precisely the opposite manner, we discover that this generic inscription mimics the legal procedures that I have been arguing Eliot wishes to critique in the novel. For as brilliant and philosophically fluent as George Eliot undoubtedly was, she was a novelist first and foremost, and thus narrative was the tool she brought to bear on the philosophical problems of her world. For this reason we see that it is through those idioms specific to the novel that Eliot exposes the contradictions apparent in the social systems by which she was confronted.

Thus in *The Mill on the Floss*, we see that Maggie Tulliver must be wiped from the face of the earth by an "awful visitation from God" so that order might be restored to the Protestant community of St. Oggs (538). Like Eliot's treatment of Hetty in *Adam Bede*, Eliot's intervention against Maggie in the form of a Biblical flood is an aesthetic and specifically generic expression of the miraculous and inevitable character of the exception, a concept for which she lacked a precise philosophical idiom, but for which she did not lack a religious language. In a similar manner, George Eliot emphasizes the theological aspect of the legal operations she depicts in *Adam Bede* in her effort to describe the exceptional character of the state powers brought to bear against Hetty Sorrel. And finally, Eliot gives us Arthur Donnithorne, the mutilated Romantic hero, miraculously riding into Stoniton to rescue Hetty, carrying not a sword, but "a hard won release from death" (503). This much criticized *deux ex machina* of Eliot's novel emphasizes just how capricious was the sentence

leveled against Hetty and demonstrates not only the famous indecisiveness of liberal practices but that such indecisiveness necessitates arbitrary decisions to produce resolution. For on the document in Arthur's hand is written yet another decision, just one more arbitrary decree. Thomas Hobbes, a progenitor of the modern concept of natural law that so deeply influenced Carl Schmitt, famously wrote in his *Leviathan*, "Covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all." Here Arthur carries the word and not the sword, but in the symbolic economy of Eliot's novel, I think, this is precisely the point. George Eliot understands that the violence of the sword is always already inscribed within the word of the law.

THE NEUTRALIZATION OF AFFILIATION IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

Late in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* (1878), the rustic matron Susan Nunsuch, in an effort to "counteract the malign spell which she imagine[s]" is directed against her son by Eustacia Vye, engages in "a ghastly invention of superstition," "calculated to bring powerlessness, atrophy and annihilation on any human against who it was directed."[1] Despite the dismissive manner in which the narrator initially describes the irrational impetus for Susan's "ghastly" labor, the narrative nonetheless proceeds, now in a more objective mode, to describe meticulously the process by which Susan Nunsuch fastidiously fashions, tortures, and then immolates the "human form," in "effigy," of Eustacia Vye (347, 349). Susan's painstaking labors are presented as deeply ambivalent: the love for her son and the hatred of her perceived enemy synergize to fuel the intensity of the efforts directed against that "evil influence," which the cottager believes is "exercised by Eustacia's propinquity" (347). She is both methodical and savage. The most primal form of human connection, Hardy demonstrates, energizes a visceral act against one not similarly affiliated and whose sudden proximity provokes a violently protective response.

As one not native to the heath, the Egdon locals view Eustacia Vye as a "queer mortal," likely responsible for the "bewitching of Susan's children" (32, 176). Susan's defensive act, "calculated," as it is, "to bring powerlessness" to the enemy, is a compensatory adaptation. Her fetishism reduces the threat to a "shape which tolerably well resembled a

[1] Hardy, *The Return of the Native* 347. All subsequent quotations are cited parenthetically in the text.

woman [that] stood about six inches high," condensing the unknown into a manageable form so that it might be banished from the known world on which it intrudes (347). Like the skimmity-ride from the later *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) or the observance of Bonfire Night that plays such an important role in *The Return of the Native*, Susan's superstitious actions are fundamentally an attempt to restore order to an existence perceived to have been thrown out of balance by the threat of an outsider, in this case "Eustacia's influence as a witch" (314).

Hardy stipulates that Susan's embrace of magic is not an anomaly on Egdon Heath. Rather her "ghastly invention" was "a practice well known on Egdon at that date" (347). In the 1895 Preface to the novel Hardy sets "that date" as somewhere "between 1840 and 1850."[2] Thus Hardy stresses that the types of primitive cognitive procedures epitomized by the actions of Susan Nunsuch persist into the rationalized mid-Victorian world. The survival of antique epistemologies produces the conditions for an often comparative energy in Hardy's narratives, and thus we see Hardy's narrator frequently evince an objectively anthropological attitude toward the subjects it depicts. Certainly this is the case with Susan. Susan's superstitious fatalism orders her world by consigning what it does not understand to magical powers or a mythical provenance. Here ritualized exclusion sustains cognitive and community stability by producing a strange synergy of antipathy and loyalty. Though Hardy understands such procedures to be primitive, he nonetheless sees modern rationalizing techniques as employing similar epistemological methods—methods often reproduced by his narrative voices—in an effort to create and maintain order.

Thus the brief passage with which I began is exemplary of a seminal theme not only of *The Return of the Native*, but also of Hardy's novels more generally. In often complex ways,

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[2] See Thomas Hardy, "Appendix A: 1895 Preface," *The Return of the Native* 430.

Hardy's novels demonstrate the importance of exclusion to individual cognition and agency, as well as to the maintenance of the community as a political entity. As for George Eliot, Thomas Hardy is concerned that exclusion is intrinsic to the formalizing procedures that characterize liberalism and modern liberal subjectivity. However, though Hardy understands exclusion to be essential to liberalism and modern liberal subjectivity, he also recognizes the role exclusion plays in culture to be deeply atavistic—his novels characterize such processes as anthropological survivals, that is, as primary sociocultural practices that remain vestigial in more modern community procedures. In other words, Hardy presents exclusion and expulsion as being common to the long trajectory of human cultural development. I will argue in this chapter that Hardy's novels envision this trajectory as being frustrated and disturbed by an incipient cosmopolitan impulse, evidenced by characters like Clym Yeobright and Angel Clare, which disrupts what he presents as the actually arbitrary but apparently "natural" processes that concretize human affiliation. Hardy ultimately depicts Clym Yeobright's Comtean cosmopolitanism as "an attempt to disturb a sequence to which man has long been accustomed" (172). Rather than inducing the creation of broad or universal forms of affiliation, for Hardy cosmopolitanism ultimately effaces those most immediate and concrete types of human connection. As these forms of affiliation and identity are neutralized in the fluid, putatively egalitarian world of liberal democracy, they are replaced by proliferating domains of struggle and conflict.

Hardy's novels are anxious that as concrete and localized affiliations disappeared in the wake of liberal cosmopolitanism's universalizing impulse, social relations would cede to an inchoate violence. In this sense, Hardy shared Carl Schmitt's concerns regarding the universalizing tendencies of liberal cosmopolitanism. For Schmitt, a universalized "concept of humanity excludes the concept of the enemy" (*Concept of the Political* 54). However, this in

no way signifies the end of enmity or violence. In fact, rather the opposite is true. Such a broad reconfiguration of politics is responsible for what Carl Schmitt referred to as the neutralization of previously politicized domains. Akin to what Marx decried as the merely "political" emancipation of man in a liberal democracy, for Schmitt each neutralized space, so to speak, becomes inevitably a new field of struggle, shot through with divergent interests.[3] If universalism's goal is the neutralization of humanity itself as a political concept, then for Schmitt, and I want to argue, Hardy as well, universalism necessarily denotes a social milieu characterized by autonomous, atomized individual relations, rather than the collectivized relations between political groups or political identities. In Schmitt's view, as the neutralized space is inevitably reenergized by divergent interests, new fields of struggle are created, which effectively render the social space a war of all against all. Thus processes of neutralization proliferate areas of struggle and conflict: "in the new domain, at first considered neutral, the antitheses of men and interests unfold with a new intensity and become increasingly sharper" (*Concept of the Political* 90).

This is the vision of human relations that the novels of Thomas Hardy reflexively acknowledge as always present beneath that "sense of order" that gives structure to the cultivated world of late Victorian England. Hardy's novels demonstrate that by the nineteenth century, liberal cosmopolitanism has disturbed sequences to which man has long been accustomed. To put the problem very simply, this disturbance produces what is for Hardy's major characters an inability to tell friend from enemy. The result is a debilitating confusion and at the cognitive level an inward turn, which is evident in the violent solipsism of characters like William Boldwood, Eustacia Vye, and Tess Durbeyfield. This confusion is

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[3] Karl Marx, "On The Jewish Question," *The Portable Karl Marx* (Penguin: New York, 1983) 99-105.

symptomatic of the general atmosphere of skepticism and distrust that pervades the worlds of so many of Hardy's novels, in which the division and divergence of interests is only one symptom of a more general epistemological crisis. One need only reference an early novel like *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) and witness discord and confusion caused by the identity-shifting Sergeant Troy to understand that this difficulty is general in Hardy. As Boldwood's murderous response to this confusion indicates, the instabilities that Hardy characterizes as emanating from this inability to discern friend from foe are apt to erupt into acute scenes of violence.

In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), the motif of friend and enemy, particularly when associated with Alec D'Urberville, takes on a chiasmic structure, where one pole of the dichotomy is presented only to be immediately reversed by the intrusion of the other: Alec is "an Enemy in the shape of a Friend"; "though I have been your enemy," Alec assures Tess, "I am your friend"; Alec has been granted access to Tess at Flintcomb-Ash because he comes, "she knew" "as a friend, or enemy" (288, 280, 263). Yet, Alec is merely the overdetermined exemplar of these Mephistophelean dangers. Tess's repeated use by her family as a currency not merely for social advancement, but indeed as an instrument used for basic survival, indicates that even the most essential forms of human affiliation are compromised in a world where values have been instrumentalized by an exchange economy and a new social paradigm ruled by individualism. The confusion regarding identity and affiliation in *Tess* is representative of deeper epistemological instability wrought by this new moral economy and to which Alec's murder at Tess's hands is the final, fraught response. Focusing mainly on *The Return of the Native* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, in this essay I will argue that Hardy's novels demonstrate what he felt to be the broad generalization of antipathy in society and that Hardy depicts this proliferation of violence as resulting from

the neutralization of concrete human affiliation under the pressures of liberal cosmopolitanism. When sequences are disturbed, that is, when those forms of connection that lend stability to the world are broken, the cultural forms that obscure and work to curb "the defects of natural laws" cease to function adequately (167). Thus man sees—or perhaps more accurately feels—quite clearly, "the quandary that [he] is put in by the operation" of those natural laws (RN 167). Certainly this is the case with *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891), a novel pregnant with latent violence and in which Tess discovers that beneath the vain façade of human intercourse "all is injustice, punishment, exaction, death" (218). Thomas Hardy's novels ultimately ask the question that, as we have seen, Eliot's later novels in particular struggle to answer affirmatively: Is moral action, or morality of any sort, possible outside of the insular and circumscribed world of rapidly disappearing tradition?

Disturbed Sequences

Perhaps none of Hardy's modern characters embody the cosmopolitan impulse as well as *The Return of the Native's* Clym Yeobright. "Yeobright loved his kind" (171). "He was a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance as his text" (172). Having recently returned to the Heath from the continent, Clym brought with him the intellectual "development he owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time" (172). The "ethical systems" Yeobright embraces, generally understood to be those of Auguste Comte, produce in Clym "a conviction that the want of most men was a knowledge of the sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence" (131). Clym's idealistic repudiation of the material and his notion that man can move "from the bucolic to the intellectual life" without moving through the developmental "stages" of "worldly advance" emphasizes both his naïveté and his hypocrisy (172). Clym stresses

abstractions over concrete particularities: he "wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class" (131). Hardy's ironic treatment of Clym's "advanced position" critiques the ideal of cultivation, which Hardy understands to be—much like Cym himself—largely vapid: "to argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which man has long been accustomed" (172). This seemingly benign criticism, however, has a darker undercurrent, for Hardy reminds us at the same moment that the impetus of civilization is not to be found in "advanced positions," but rather in violence: "Had Phillip's warlike son been intellectually so far ahead as to have attempted civilization without bloodshed, he would have been twice the godlike here that he seemed to be, but nobody would have heard of an Alexander" (172). As if enunciating a central thematic of his novelistic corpus, Hardy underscores the violent element repudiated by nineteenth-century perfectionist idealism and orients his readers to the reality that any "attempt [at] civilization without bloodshed" is a counterfactual ideal.

Whether or not Hardy truly had Comte in mind specifically when he developed the character of Clym Yeobright, the passages above provide well enough a passing description of concepts central to the French positivist's thinking. Clym's increasing asceticism demonstrates a putative embrace of altruism and the general repudiation of self-interestedness in the name of not only community, but of humanity. Hardy's reference to Yeobright as a "John the Baptist," that is, as an itinerant preacher concerned with the "ennoblement" of man, while a significant bit of prolepsis in the book, also invokes the Comtean notion of a secularized religion of humanity.[4] Moreover, this section of the novel's

[4] Though Comte has fallen into some disrepute in our contemporary times, it is worth noting that his thought in many ways remains prominent because of the attention given to writers

repeated references to "stages," "sequences," "transitional phases," and of course "sequences," (if not simply a gesture to the general notion of man's progressivism that was so important to Victorian thought) likely points to Comte's perfectionist vision of cosmopolitan universalism, which rested on a philosophy of history emphasizing the advance of man in distinct stages. Cosmopolitanism, largely understood in the Victorian age as stage in the general improvement of (at least European) man, is deeply allied with modalities of human self-understanding predicated on man's intellectual and cultural progressiveness.

Cosmopolitanism, as much a mode of thinking and understanding as acting, generally espouses the renunciation of local and national affiliation in favor of universal interdependencies. Here the distinctions between particulars and universals, individuals and affiliated wholes are bridged by formalized and shared epistemological procedures. While the universalizing ideals of cosmopolitanism prevalent toward the latter half of the nineteenth century was predicated on a broad inclusiveness, this inclusiveness was based on the cultivation of an abstract, formalized rationality and an idealized apolitical (and at once highly politicized) concept of humanity. The individual freedoms found in recognized modalities of mutually constituted rational, and thus moral norms, such as Kant's concept of "cosmopolitan right," were to some extent dependent on overcoming or at least taking

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deeply influenced by his thinking, such as George Eliot, Herbert Spencer, and John Stuart Mill, as well as Hardy. George Eliot's concept of consensus formation as the natural growth of relational interdependencies between the constituent parts of humanity, itself understood as an organism (Hegelian as this formulation is) likely had its principal influence in Comte (who was also clearly inspired by Hegel). Thus we find in George Eliot and Thomas Hardy divergent views of cosmopolitanism that nonetheless likely derive from the same source.

precedent over divergent or parochial value systems.[5] Universalism in this sense is a general strategy of cultivation, of "raising the class" of humanity toward its end as a species.

For Kant, though local particularities were to be respected, abstract universal principles take precedence over those normative claims rising from more immediate forms of affiliation. In Kant's concept of cosmopolitan right, abstract moral claims cannot be arbitrary if they have their basis in a principle of "public right [that] derives from the general will that is given *a priori*" (*Perpetual Peace* 133). This safeguard disappears, however, if we understand reason to be not "pure," but rather the product of that merely conventional or "collective thought" that Durkheim, for instance, understood as identical to reason (341). In this case the cosmopolitan self-consciousness is potentially, if not entirely, an invidious construction, constituted to some extent through its relation to an otherness deemed less culturally or intellectually advanced. The dependence on perceived asymmetry epitomizes the aggrandized self-understanding of both Clym Yeobright and Angel Clare. Hardy at moments self-consciously reproduces this sort of subjectivity constituting gaze in the objective ironies of his narrative voices, and particularly in those moments when the narrator attempts to exert a rationalizing control over the narrative. Though I believe it is important to understand that Hardy recognizes here a fundamental contradiction of the universalizing tendency—that it requires the very asymmetries that it espouses to transcend—this is not, I think, his greatest concern.

The most pressing problem for Hardy is that in its dominative drive to universalize, liberal cosmopolitan's impulse disturbs, displaces, and effaces those modes of established affiliation that ground human cognition and agency. In the actions of Susan Nunsuch

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[5] Kant, *Perpetual Peace* 112-113. "All men who can mutually influence one another," writes Kant, "must accept some civil constitution"; that is, some publicly recognized—and thus moral—order of reciprocal relations (112).

described at the beginning of this essay, Hardy provides a functional model, however retrograde, of human agency tied to a specific epistemological mode. What Hardy's narrative posits as the arbitrary and purely coincidental relationship between Eustacia's proximity and young Charlie Nunsuch's illness have, conversely, a definite cause and effect relationship in the mind of Charlie's mother. By producing reasons, she excludes other troubling possibilities. Having established such a relationship, Susan can then embark on a definite course of action to remedy what is to her mind a well-defined problem. Despite obvious faults, Susan's primitive cognitive procedures are to some extent effective, if only because she is able to render her actions commensurate with her beliefs and perceptions, however narrow or circumscribed they may be. Hardy sheds light on the specific relationships between knowledge and action that organize the life-world, for lack of a better term, of this representative native of Egdon Heath. The cognitive order created through exclusion and identification contrasts the general psychological anxieties produced by the more reflective and expansive understanding of the nonnatives such as Clym and Eustacia.

However, the characters that people the worlds of Thomas Hardy are not the only ones who struggle with the complex limits of what is knowable, and what is known. Hardy's narrative voices demonstrate this struggle in very significant ways as well. In their responses to the crisis of values I have described, Hardy's narratives often self-consciously replicate the very techniques that mark modern rationalizing procedures. His narrators will mimic the struggles of his characters as they attempt to come to terms with a world that exceeds their capacity to know it. We see this exemplified in the famous opening description of the Heath from the first chapter of *The Return of the Native*. In fact, the entirety of the first chapter illustrates simultaneously the aggressive nature of aesthetic experience—the agent narrator's propensity to formalize experience through appropriation—and the crisis of experience

stemming from the incoherence of subjective perception. In this way the form of Hardy's novel attests to the epistemological challenges manifest in what Gillian Beer has called the difficulty in Hardy of "finding a scale for the human" (*Darwin's Plots* 236-258).

> The heaven being spread with this pallid screen, the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an installment of night which had taken its place before its astronomical hour had come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half-an-hour to eve; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread (9).

The narrator tries to conceal the apparent incoherencies of the scene through repeated processes of redirection and identification. The efforts to anthropomorphize the landscape, to reduce or substitute, like Susan's fetishism, are attempts to control and appropriate by producing identity. Likewise, the arbitrary creation of a particular subjectivity in the "furze-cutter" is an endeavor to induce form and coherence by limiting perspective. So too are the narrator's efforts at delimitation. Yet the "meeting-lines" and other delineations, which the narrator announces as "clearly marked," quickly dissolve, producing uncertainties for the viewer. Similarly, the passage's subjunctive mood, coupled with the imposed subjectivity's indecision—the decision to work or not work, is contingent on the worker looking up or down, and thus dependent on an arbitrary view as to whether it is actually day or night—undermines the attempt to impose stability and control.

In this rationalizing mode, Hardy's narrator evinces a distanced, anthropological interest in the objects it observes and narrates. Because it so successfully resists cultivation, Egdon Heath exists as an anthropological potentiality for Hardy's narrator: "There had been no obliteration [on the heath] because there had been no tending"; thus "in the heath's

barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian" (20). *The Return of the Native* presents the landscape of Egdon Heath itself as vestigial, uncanny—a primeval remainder: "The untameable, Ishmaelite thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilization was its enemy" (12). Precisely because the heath suggests what modern man had hoped to leave behind but did not, that the heath is so often discomfiting. The Ishmaelite landscape implies those putatively repressed "natural laws" and their inherent violence, which have put men in such a predicament. The heath is the ever-present "then" impinging on the cultivated "now"; the physical, uncanny projection of Hardy's famous psychological "ache of modernism," from *Tess* (98). In this sense the coexistence of contrasting temporalities, and what they suggest, is what is so disruptive in *The Return of the Native*. The disturbed consciousness produced by these unbridgeable contradictions, which are so troubling for Hardy's moderns, is precisely what Hardy's rustic but Promethean heathmen are able to drive into the catch-all world of "limbo" and "darkness" during the ritual process of Bonfire Night.

Still, despite an awareness of his predicament, Clym cannot accept his limited control over internal and external nature in the fatalistic fashion of Hardy's rustics. In an early description of Clym Yeobright, in which the narrator once again indulges in his propensity to synergize the aesthetic and the anthropological, we see that Clym's "face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period in art hereafter, its Phidias may produce such faces" (167). While the allusion may be unintended, Hardy nonetheless presents here an interesting revision of Hegelian aesthetics. For Hegel, "every work belongs to its *age*, to its *nation*, and to its environment, and depends upon particularly

historical and other ideas and aims."[6] The study of artistic production is a deeply anthropological enterprise for Hegel because, as none other than the sensual expression of man's intellectual and cultural progression, art is intrinsically an historical metric of human development. Thus there can be no "classic period in art hereafter"—for Hegel or for Hardy—because that epoch of perfection, epitomized for Hegel in sculptures like those of Phidias, expressed the immanent balance of mind and matter of (an idealized) Greek culture itself.

Whereas for Hegel the intellectual development of man in modernity rendered any form of physical art inadequate to the expression of that development in modernity, for Hardy this relationship is oddly reversed. For Hardy, man's recognition that "the defects of natural laws" are in fact his own defects has put him in a "quandary." For this reason "physically beautiful men—the glory of the race when it was young—are almost an anachronism now" (167). The modern mind, embodied as it is, does indeed have its sensual expression in the physical human form. Yeobright is proof that "thought is a disease of the flesh and that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with a full sense of the coil of things" (137). In viewing Clym, the "philosopher" as well as the "artist" "deplores, each from his point of view, the mutually destructive interdependence of spirit and flesh" (137). The paradox of Hardy's thought, and the source of Clym's mental anguish, is that the greater insight gained into human nature, what he calls "modern perceptiveness," results in a more acute disruption of the formal harmony he desires (167). There is always a regressive element in the cultural and scientific advance of man because these advances only give evidence to his greatest fears—though he wishes himself apart from nature, in fact he too,

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[6] Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics Vol. One* 18.

"red in tooth and claw," is inescapably guided by those principles he shares with nature.[7]

The recursive fact of violence in Hardy is the constant reminder of the identity of man and nature. There is a portion of man that, like the heath, is essentially uncultivable—unformalizable. It is for this reason, Hardy explains, that "solitude seemed to look out of [man's] countenance" (11). J. Hillis Miller has called the recurrent themes of solipsism and isolationism in Hardy the "movement of passive withdrawal," and describes such withdrawal as the psychological, physical, and sociological response to "the threat of an engulfing violence which will shake and twist a man's life. Only if he can remain self-contained, sealed off from everything, can he escape this violence" (*Distance and Desire* 6). Miller senses here the repressed enmity that characterizes Hardy's novels; the propensity for that withdrawal Miller illuminates in Hardy is indistinguishable from the exclusions that are the agent's cognitive adaptation to her sense of a socially embedded antipathy. Yet Miller describes only the late stage response to the condition, symptomatic of Hardy's narrators, and his modern characters. For broadly speaking there seem to be two options open in the face of such "an engulfing violence." One, as Miller no doubt argues correctly, is for the agent to recuse himself as best he can and withdraw. Or, as I showed above, he can seek safety in numbers, that is, in the political aggregate; this describes Hardy's rustics. In the second case, the tendency toward solitude, clearly the product of apprehension and fear, is diffused by immediate and concrete forms of affiliation, and those political ties that are produced through the recognition of a common enemy. I will discuss these broader forms of political affiliation and their ultimate dissolution in the next section of this essay.

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[7] Alfred Tennyson, *In Memorium*, *The Major Works*, (New York: Oxford UP, 2000) 236.

Origins and Exclusions in The Return of the Native

The Return of the Native begins and ends on Guy Fawkes Night, the annual commemoration of the 1605 attempted regicide of Elizabeth's successor James I.[8] The novel unfolds over a year's span between successive celebrations of the event, which the denizens of Egdon Heath observe not as Guy Fawkes Night, but as Bonfire Night. By emphasizing Bonfire Night, Hardy not only dehistoricizes but also depoliticizes the occasion, choosing to stress the overtly primitive and ritualistic significance of the event for the Egdon natives. Rather than marking a specific historical event or date, as does Guy Fawkes Night, Hardy's heathmen ritually observe the timeless, cyclic patterns of the natural world. Traditionally tied to the change of seasons, in *The Return of the Native* Bonfire Night celebrates the end of harvest season even as the rite functions as a ceremonial recognition of the difficult winter months to come. The narrator's description emphasizes the pagan origins of the custom and evinces an anthropological interest not only in the event, but in the natives of Egdon Heath themselves:

> It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre lay flat and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. The flames from the funeral piles long kindled there had shown down upon the lowlands as these were shining now. Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathman were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about the Gunpowder Plot. (20).

Here Hardy disassociates the Egdon natives' observance of Bonfire Night from its modern, political import. The "popular" political significance of Guy Fawkes Night is not, Hardy's narrator stresses, "familiar with this spot." The natives' self-understanding is fixed to the

[8] For an excellent and informative reading of the importance of the Bonfire Night celebration in this novel, see Trish Ferguson, "Bonfire Night in Hardy's *Return of the Native*," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 67.1 (2012): 87-107.

immutable Heath, which in the novel takes on a temporal significance antithetical to that of "civilization" and its deeply historical and narrativized orientation (12). The passage roots Hardy's rustics firmly in geologic, primordial time, shared with the Druids and Saxons of respectively preceding ages. Thus Hardy emphasizes the autochthony of the heathmen, for whom the significance of the rite surpasses in depth and magnitude of feeling what is otherwise dismissed as the merely political "invention" of Guy Fawkes Night. The differences Hardy is careful to cultivate between these events in *The Return of the Native* reflects contrastable ways of knowing and thus of interpreting the world.

Still, it would be a mistake to too quickly dismiss the political significance of Hardy's depiction of Bonfire Night in *The Return of the Native* merely on the merits of our narrator's efforts to link it so strongly with a primeval significance. Hardy's narrative demonstrates the very important differences between Guy Fawkes Night and Bonfire Night in order to better emphasize the structural similarities shared by the two modes of traditional observance: both customs are fundamentally political in the sense that they present ritualized actions invested in the maintenance or welfare of a civic group. Moreover, both customs are oriented, at least mimetically, toward community-creating procedures that have their bases in processes of violent exclusion. Guy Fawkes Night commemorates the preservation of the Protestant British state against its political enemies and rehearses, through the ritualized burning of Guy Fawkes's effigy, the creation of community identity through the violent repression of political and religious differences. Hardy's depiction of Bonfire Night expresses symbolic values similar to those of Guy Fawkes Night, values that are activated in the service of creating community cohesion:

> to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against the fiat that this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth

say, Let there be light. (21)

The heathmen rebel against the immutable antipathy of the heath itself—against the "fiat" imposed by an unimpeachably sovereign nature. However, the ritual is an act of recognition as much as of sedition. As a Miltonic "black chaos," the unformed, uncultivable natural world is in its sheer magnitude inimical to the heathmen. The recognition of power and enmity breeds a solidarity rising from a violent separation, a "spontaneous rebelliousness," which proves the impetus for what the narrator depicts as a basic form of political communion. This political impulse derives from the "instinctive" drive, stirred by fear and antipathy, to preserve oneself in the face of what is threatening. As the fire blazes, not only does the "human circle" increase as "stragglers, male and female" emerge from the heath to join the burgeoning group, but "perhaps as many as thirty bonfires could be counted within the whole bounds of the district": the rite produces solidarity through similitude—a similarity of sentiment and feeling that has its outward expression in the primal act of creating fire (19-20).

In tribal fashion, then, cohesion and community are shown to be contingent on exclusion and a recognized, if arbitrary, antipathy. Hardy again shows the political to be closely allied with humanity's psychological demands for order. The celebration of Bonfire Night in *The Return of the Native* allegorizes for Hardy what is an elemental human need, felt at all developmental and cultural stages, to harmonize and safeguard existence. By focusing primarily on the identification of an adversary, the rite of Bonfire Night effaces, at least momentarily, the motley aspect of the Egdon locals themselves. Ritual solidarity renders the "permanent moral expression of each face impossible to discover," in its stead producing a singular, "appreciable quantity of human countenance" (21). Through a mythopoeic process, Hardy transforms the particularities of the Heath into an absolute otherness.

Allusions to Milton and Dante lend to the passage an exaggerated, overstated Manichaeism not unlike the narrator's description of the heath in the first chapter of the novel:

> It was as if the bonfire-makers were standing in some radiant upper story of the world, detached from and independent of the dark stretches below. The heath down there was now a vast abyss, and no longer a continuation of what they stood on…the whole black phenomenon beneath represented Limbo as viewed from the brink by the sublime Florentine in his vision. (20)

The landscape remains preternatural. However, once "lost in darkness," the Heath's sudden detachment from the very "world" of the heathmen putatively negates its fecund, teeming particularity, which Hardy elsewhere describes through Eustacia's eyes as "the infinity of combined multitudes" (56).

Through a process of exclusion, the heath is transformed into an amorphous abyss: singular, inscrutable, and intensely foreign. Though Hardy emphasizes the identity producing effects characteristic of those processes that establish alterity, he makes as clear, indulging a dominant motif of the novel, that this effect is entirely dependent on the occluded or diminished perception of the community—their insularity is merely a comfortable illusion made possible by a limited vision, by an incomplete rationality: "for their eyes, adapted to the blaze, could see nothing of the deeps beyond its influence" (20). Hardy syncretizes in his description of Bonfire Night the two fundamental origination myths of Genesis and Prometheus; thus we see that the "instinctive act" of lighting fire, as the basic impetus of civilization, is recognized here as functioning precisely as processes of exclusion and delimitation. Hardy metaphorizes in the community ritual those methods by which the individual provides order to the world by restricting it. Like Plato's cave dwellers, there exists a shared and as such indisputable reality for the natives of the heath. As we saw with Susan Nunsuch, however mystified such a reality may in fact be, merely in the circumscribed stability of its given-ness it awards security. Thus we can read Hardy's presentation of the

ritual of Bonfire Night as both a parable of political aggregation and also a model of human subjectivity. Through ritual acts of communion, we see, the denizens of Egdon Heath void the void, so to speak, producing shared meaning and political identity through creation of a delimited and thus ordered environment.

Hardy characterizes Bonfire Night in *The Return of the Native* as political in a broad, essentially Hobbesian sense. According to Hobbes, man seeks his own self-interest, which is most fundamentally served by avoiding the *summum malum* of a violent death.[9] This fundamental impulse toward self-preservation, which Hobbes describes as forming the very core of human reason, eventually leads man to transcend the state of nature, or the "condition of Warre of everyone against everyone." This is accomplished by entering into a covenant with a group of relative equals, thereby securing the safety of the individual by the power to be found in numbers.[10] Once conflict no longer characterizes individual human relations, tensions migrate and grow up between human confederations, or nations. At this stage are created the conditions in which the political may flourish for Carl Schmitt. I rehearse this familiar story because it has a specific relevance to Hardy's treatment of ritual in *The Return of the Native*. For while Bonfire Night differs very little in its essential, structural function from Guy Fawkes Night, these different iterations of the same ritual roughly emblematize Hobbes's political narrative: the former is emblematic of man's most basic and putatively primitive antagonism with nature, whereas the latter illustrates the moment beyond the point at which that antagonism has been neutralized, and the natural world subordinated; then the conflict migrates to become between men in their political iteration as groups or nations. The latter is the precarious position from which liberalism and

[9] Hobbes, *Leviathan* 69-73. See Book I, section 13.
[10] Ibid 73-74.

cosmopolitanism hope to liberate man. Yet for Hardy, these are not stages of ascent in man's progressive arc, but mere moments in a closed cycle.

By including November Fifth and the Gunpowder Plot so prominently in his novel, Hardy conjures a time when political unity was entirely contingent on an ethics of arbitrary exclusion and violence. This sort of historico-political retrospective is a recurrent feature of Hardy's novels.[11] For the various forms of absolutist politics that preceded the rise of liberalism, practices of exclusion and exceptional violence were explicitly recognized not only as a social and political reality, but also as a social and political necessity. The ritualized burning of the Guy Fawkes effigy that is the hallmark of the State-imposed celebration explicitly emblematizes the procedures of exclusion and violence that are crucial to community preservation and the maintenance of the political. These political acts, for Hardy, indicate sociological characteristics that rise as a response to elemental human needs. This sociocultural tendency is enunciated in Carl Schmitt's concept of the political:

> Every religious, moral, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy. The political does not reside in the battle itself…but in the mode of behavior [that] is determined by this possibility, by clearly evaluating the concrete situation and thereby being able to distinguish the real friend and the real enemy. (*Concept of the Political* 37)

Hardy posits the political practices of exclusion as the physical instantiations of an essentially human need for cognitive order that has its agential manifestation in the "mode of behavior" determined by the possibility of conflict. The political in the Schmittian sense, then, is a modality of self-understanding as much as a material arrangement—a principally cognitive state. The political is not violent per se, but rather a product of the clear distinction between "us" on the one hand and "them" on the other hand that originates a tension produced

[11] This is a persistent trait of Hardy's novels. For two excellent examples, see note 18 below.

precisely by the latency of violence, rather than the open prosecution of war. The political, then, does not correspond to peace, but rather to those tensions that characterize what Kant described as a mere suspension of hostilities, which "tacitly reserves issues for a future war" (*Perpetual Peace* 107).

On the one hand Hardy superimposes the historically and anthropologically laden semantic potentials of Bonfire Night and Guy Fawkes Night as a means of establishing similarity between apparently contrasting examples of human conduct and human need. This is not an uncommon feature of Hardy's novels, but rather is exemplary of the comparative anthropology of Hardy's narrative methods. In this case Hardy does so in order to contrast those atavistic sociopolitical practices dependent on exclusion with what I have called, borrowing from Carl Schmitt, the neutralization of political practices, which characterize English society as it nears the turn of the twentieth century. Hardy was well aware that by the middle of the nineteenth century the political significance of Guy Fawkes Night had changed. In Hardy's own experience, the event had become the occasion of almost carnivalesque political rebellion and violence. Millgate writes,

> When still a small boy [Hardy] was taken by his father to witness the burning in effigy of the Pope and Cardinal Wiseman in the Old Roman Amphitheater at Dorchester during the No-Popery Riots. The sight to young Hardy was most lurid, and he never forgot it; and when the cowl of one of the monks in the ghastly procession blew aside and revealed the features of one of his father's workmen his bewilderment was great. (26)[12]

[12] Trish Ferguson also comments on this passage in Millgate: see Ferguson, "Bonfire Night in Thomas Hardy's *The Return of the Native* 87. It is worth noting that Dorchester's Roman Amphitheater comes to factor significantly in Hardy's later *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. The location's "sinister" and "sanguinary" associations, which had accumulated over the course of millennia, ranged from blood sport to official state executions as well as, apparently, Guy Fawkes Night rituals. But Hardy emphasizes that such activities were always the impetus for community congregation. In *The Mayor*, for example, the narrator recounts the ghastly execution of a woman who had allegedly murdered her husband (based, evidently, on a true story that influenced not only this novel, but *Tess* as well), and which had taken place "in the presence of ten thousand spectators" (*Mayor* 69).

Certainly here the Guy Fawkes celebration maintained its traditional anti-Catholic force. However, oriented though it was against the Papacy's restoration of the Catholic hierarchy, the Bonfire Night violence of 1850 and 1851 was primarily a protest *against* the British state, and its general liberalization of anti-Catholic laws throughout the first part of the nineteenth century.[13] In fact, in the contemporary iteration most recognizable for Hardy's readers, Guy Fawkes Night regularly exceeded its function as an anti-Catholic, pro-state holiday, becoming the occasion of sometimes violent political actions oriented against the state, for a wide range of politically volatile reasons including enclosure, the Corn Laws, and Chartism.[14]

The point being, rather than a ritual celebration emblematizing community preservation achieved through exclusion, Guys Fawkes Night and Bonfire Night in their modern iterations signify instead the entropic disintegration of national cohesion exacerbated by increasing social heterogeneity. In other words, the antagonisms that drive these sorts of communal rites had turned inward so to speak, to address perceived structural and societal imbalances based on much more individualized or specialized social interests, as opposed to the less opaque and much more broadly based forms of enmity exemplified, for instance, in the political tensions between Man and Nature, Catholic and Protestant, or French and English. Because by the time Hardy was writing *The Return of the Native*, the commemoration of Guy Fawkes Night had come to mark, much more than the celebration of state preservation, the representative ambivalence toward the state and general fractiousness that, as I argued in my previous chapters, is typical of the mass politicization of late Victorian liberal democratic society.

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[13] Saho Matusoto-Best, *Britain and the Papacy in the Age of Revolution: 1846-1851* (Rochester: Boydell Press, 2003) 146-154.

[14] See Ferguson 88. Ferguson provides a long and inclusive list of newspaper articles describing Guy Fawkes Night violence in the years between 1846 and 1869.

The political factionalism and general antagonism that characterized nineteenth-century English society resulted from what Schmitt understood as the "negation of the political," which occurs "exactly at the moment when society and state penetrate one another" (*Concept of the Political* 70, 22). For Schmitt the "rule of morality, law and economics" within the liberal paradigm assumes a less "concrete political meaning" (*Concept of the Political* 70). Thus as the validity of norms come to rest on abstractions, they also become more susceptible to interpretation and thus more divisible, dissolving the political "partially into an individualistic domain of private law and morality, partially into economic notions" based on "the dynamic of perpetual competition" (*Concept of the Political* 71-72). Consequently the negation of the political leads necessarily to a "practice of distrust" (*Concept of the Political* 70) that pervades societal relationships. The political disorder of late Victorian England, of which Guy Fawkes Night becomes symptomatic, is indicative of this process of neutralization. In the absence of the political, that is, in the absence a mode of behavior structured by the knowledge of an essential enmity between friend and enemy, this enmity becomes generalized, and the social sphere assumes the shape of a war between individuals. As I wrote in the introduction to this essay, Hardy understands this world of general enmity as more and more characterizing the actual relations of human beings and that man's outright reversion to a natural state of violence is barely forestalled by the formalizing techniques of culture. However, Hardy's novels want us to see that as these techniques become more abstract, they also become less effective because they become so general as to court incoherence. Hardy's cosmopolitan characters, I will argue in the next section, model such incoherence and the violent confusion it engenders.

Friends and Enemies in Tess of the D'Urbervilles

It may seem odd, initially, to turn to the novels of Thomas Hardy for a consideration of the effects of cosmopolitan thought and action in late Victorian England. One might object that Hardy is most concerned with the specifically urban social pressures arrayed against the particularities of rural existence. Of course, this is to some extent correct, but as Raymond Williams has noted, the relationships—personal, political, temporal—that structure Hardy's novels should not be reduced to broad dichotomizations: "the pressures to which Hardy's characters are subjected are then pressures from within a system of living, itself now thoroughly a part of a wider system. There is no simple case of an internal ruralism and an external urbanism" (*Country and the City* 209). The central importance of the Casterbridge (Dorchester) corn exchange to novels such as *Far From the Madding Crowd* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is certainly proof of the synergy Williams is pointing out. Particularly in the latter novel, the exchange, as the local terminus of a global enterprise, exerts a deleterious agency over Henchard as a man and Casterbridge as a community. In *The Mayor of Casterbridge* the mechanized cadence of the market economy is shown by Hardy to be hopelessly out of rhythm with the immutable cycles of nature's own mode of production, and the incongruence of the two competing purposive systems expresses itself fully in the form of that novel. This is no less the case in *Tess*, in which the traditional Old Lady-Day migrations of "the agricultural world" no longer depended entirely on the seasonal ebb and flow of work, but "were on the increase" due to the new technological and economic pressures that were interpenetrating the rural economy (277). Looking back on the body of his novels in a "1912 Preface" to *Far From the Madding Crowd*, Hardy acknowledged that "the supplanting of a class of stationary cottagers by more or less migratory laborers [had] led to a break of continuity in local history, more fatal than any other to the preservation of close

inter-social relations [as well as] eccentric individualities" (393). This historical and thus cultural "break in continuity" is perhaps the dominant structuring principle of Hardy's novels.

Hence the forces that activate Hardy's novels cannot be described completely as the antagonism between ideas of country and city, rural and urban, rustic and citizen. Rather, the "wider system" of which these antagonisms are symptomatic should be understood as certainly including, but also exceeding, the concept of the metropolis or nation. For in Hardy's novels there is no turning one's back on the increasingly evident fact that one is part of an ever-expanding world. In "the south of Europe" Mrs. Charmond is oppressed by the "crowd of ideas and fancies thronging upon [her] continuously"; she significantly seeks out Grace Melbury, "somebody with whom [she is] in sympathy," to anchor her own identity amidst such unsettling diversity (*Woodlanders* 60). The Scottish Farfrae moves through Casterbridge on his way to Bristol and then America, and the "great wheat-growing districts of the West" (*Mayor* 46). Angel Clare also seeks his fortune beyond England, eventually eschewing the "Colonies" for South America, yet doing so not merely to secure a profitable vocation, but to ensure what he "valued even more than a competency—intellectual liberty" (*Tess* 92). And crucially there is Clym Yeobright, who is perhaps Hardy's most explicit avatar of the crisis of values he associates with cosmopolitanism. Recently returned to Egdon Heath form Paris, Clym attempts to import his Comtean inspired cosmopolitanism to a "world not ripe for" his intentions to "raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class."[15] Even as he mocks the already anachronistic aesthetic elitism of Mrs. Charmond's brand of cosmopolitanism (she intends to write a "new

[15] As these examples show, for Hardy material interests are never separable from processes of acculturation, but are inextricably bound together in new modes of self-understanding and agency that we can here associate with the cosmopolitanism impulse.

Sentimental Journey"), in characters like Farfrae, Clare, and Yeobright, Hardy underscores the deeply bourgeois character of the more contemporary cosmopolitan liberal (*Woodlanders* 60).

It is precisely Angel Clare's bourgeois detachment, his undetermined "intellectual liberty," that Hardy rejects in *Tess*, and this rejection is crystallized in Hardy's comparison of the elder Clare and his son. The distinction between Angel and his father demonstrates the contradictions that Georg Lukács identified as inherent in "the modern state of society," which transforms "knowledge more and more into the systematic and conscious contemplation of purely formal connection, those "laws" that function in—objective—reality *without the intervention of the subject*" (*History of Class Consciousness* 128). The formalization of the liberal, cosmopolitan subject is indistinguishable, in Hardy, from the objectification or fetishization of agency within the "second nature" of modern life. The value of actions in the public sphere far outweighs their internal private or moral value, or rather the latter is gradually adjusted so as to become virtually identical with the former. This is a sort of perversion of Kant's axiom regarding the moral significance of publicity and will be exploited to a great effect in the narrative procedures of writers such as Henry James and Joseph Conrad. However, Hardy is himself not insensitive to the paradox of formalized agency, which becomes both a formal and thematic element of his novels. Angel's father seems immune to the types of corruption and confusion Hardy associates with the modern subject: "One thing [the elder Clare] certainly was," Hardy tells us, is "sincere," and of course this is precisely what Angel finds it impossible to be. Hardy ties Mr. Clare's sincerity explicitly to "his simplicity in life and thought": Mr. Clare had "in his raw youth made up his mind once and for all on the deeper questions of existence, and admitted no further reasoning on them thenceforward" (123).

The unfaltering Reverend Clare is the antithesis of the irresolute son, and Hardy is

careful to emphasize that father and son are culturally and epistemologically representative of conflicting systems: "between Angel, the child of his old age, and the father, there seemed to be almost a missing generation" (89). The Good Reverend's "geocentric view of things," which consisted of "a zenithal paradise [and] a nadiral hell," is a universal outlook, certainly, but one in which authority rises as if inwardly from a core of stable, fixed beliefs—dependent on the exclusion of any "further reasoning" or "deeper questions." The epistemological stance of the elder Clare is precisely opposed to Angel's Copernican vision, which, never fixed, appropriately looks without for its energy and stability. In contrast to his father, Angel cleaves to the dictum recommending, "*the removing of those things that are shaken,* [so] *that those things which cannot be shaken may remain*" (91). The maxim describes precisely the formalizing impulse of the liberal cosmopolitan impulse and the types of exclusion it too embraces. Yet this epistemological mode hardly lends stability to Clare's world, for once the shaking begins it seems never to stop. Angel is consequently "nebulous, preoccupied, vague," never sure in his vision of which "things" should be removed and which should remain (89-90). Angel's general skepticism and the confusion it engenders is largely responsible for his ethical failures as regards Tess: his predilection for formal abstraction, his "will to subdue the substance to the conception," has only the effect of sundering those affiliations most important to him—not only with Tess, but with his father as well.

If Daniel Deronda is in many ways exemplary of the brand of cultivated cosmopolitanism that some critics have valorized as a reflective ideal, then Angel Clare epitomizes the practical failures of such an ideal.[16] Angel cultivates a "habit of neglecting the

[16] In contrast to some common critical perceptions of George Eliot's eponymous protagonist in *Daniel Deronda*, in Hardy meaningful affiliations cannot function in the abstract. Because of what Eliot saw as the deeply teleological bent of cultivation and its universalizing impulse, what is intrinsic to insular, concretely affiliated consciousness can be

particulars of the outward scene for the general impression," and time and again this propensity to embrace an aesthetic abstraction leads him—and this is true of Clym Yeobright as well—to moral failure. Neither Clym nor Angel has the courage to trespass against those prescriptions they denounce; thus the actions of both men are enervated by the very conventions they decry. In their desire to act in accord with universals, Clym and Angel invert the cognitive processes that prove so edifying for the Egdon locals. The heathmen exclude the mass of otherness with which they cannot hope to comprehend —the "extremity" of "black chaos"—in favor of an immediate mass of known particularity and "eccentricities," which they can identify with "an appreciable quantity of human countenance." Loyalty and affiliation retain for the denizens of the heath a humane quality that is precisely antithetical to the formalized hypocrisy of Angel and Clym, who reject "the near at hand because it shows up its sorriness without shade; while vague figures far off are honoured in that their distance makes artistic virtues of their stains" (*Tess* 208). Thus ultimately each man abandons his wife based on misconstrued moral scruples. Clym, like

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preserved in types of deracinated loyalty, such as what Daniel enunciates when he famously speaks of "separateness with communication." It is worth providing a bit more from Eliot to better illustrate my point: To Joseph Kalymnos's question as to whether or not he will claim his Judaism, Daniel responds, "I shall call myself a Jew. But I will not say that I shall profess to believe exactly as my fathers have believed. Our fathers themselves changed the horizon of their belief and learned of other races." George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* 619. Daniel claims an affiliation, and bespeaks a specific loyalty, but with the explicit qualification that such loyalty can always be adjusted to accommodate a broader affiliation. Precisely because of what Hardy describes as breaks in continuity, to adjust one's horizon of belief is always a deeply troubling proposition in Hardy. Landedness and ethnicity, however arbitrarily developed, either constrain the development of cosmopolitanisms, because they reinforce the concrete affiliations of their insular worlds, or they do not. Daniel S. Malachuk finds this syncretization of national or racial identity and universal affiliations to be a nineteenth-century product that is well worth renovating for our contemporary age. So too does Amanda Anderson, who like Malachuk also looks to Eliot's novel to underwrite her argument in *The Powers of Distance*. Both scholars read this "dual attachment," as Malachuk calls it, as a developmental moment, a transition point of equipoise on the positive historical trajectory of universalism (*Nationalist Cosmopolitics* 133).

Angel, is "a slave to custom and conventionality when surprised back into his early teachings" (*Tess* 208). Clym's asceticism and Angel's aestheticism both compromise the most fundamental of human relationships, and as Hardy repeatedly emphasizes (too often to bear repeating with example), their gross moral failures stem from an occluded vision, rather than expanded and reflexive perception we might expect to be commensurate with a universal standpoint. But again these confusions are always as much problems of scale and proportion as of vision.

Angel and Clym are both exemplary of Hardy's sense that the transformation of culture under the pressures of liberal cosmopolitanism inevitably disturbs even the microlevels of culture and of human consciousness. If we look to the experiences of women like Eustacia Vye and Tess Durbeyfield, we see that the dissolution of worldviews rooted in concrete forms of affiliation and loyalty not only produce confusion, as with Clym and Angel, but also fear and distrust. Hardy characterizes Eustacia's fiercely private individualism as precisely antithetical to the primal political impulse felt by the natives of Egdon Heath. The urge toward affiliation that produces forms of loyalty in the rural community is in the more expansive modern world replaced by a pressing but general distrust that obviates this impulse, as exemplified during the ritual lighting of bonfires. Eustacia's fire, which is "directly opposite" the heathmen's fire, burns not so anyone "may enjoy it or come anigh it" (32). Nor does it burn in observance of the community ceremony. Instead Eustacia builds her fire out of self-interestedness, for the singular purpose of attracting her lover Wildeve (32). Moreover, unconcerned with her profligacy, she burns the valuable wood Captain Drew has amassed over the summer, and stored to combat the hard winter months ahead.

Yet despite her self-centered individualism, Eustacia's belief that she can transcend

the world of suffering, her "rebellious" propensity to "believe in [her] own power," takes on a moral quality in *The Return of the Native*, if precisely because the bright force of her own being tragically dooms her to fail in an "ill-conceived world" (69, 85). Unlike for Clym, who renounces possibilities Eustacia can very literally only dream of, Hardy emphasizes that Eustacia inhabits a "world in which doing means marrying" (73). By attempting to escape the limitations of Egdon ("her Hades") by the only means available to her, she ultimately falls victim to the circumscription she strives to escape. Eustacia is ultimately sorely treated in her quest to fulfill the requirements of domestic life, for certainly we feel that she hardly deserves the violent treatment she meets at the hands of her deluded husband.[17] Significantly, however, the very real physical threat Clym poses to Eustacia, not unlike her earlier bloodletting at the hands of Susan Nunsuch, indicates an actual violence that exists above and beyond what the narrator posits merely as the projection of Eustacia's perception, or persecution complex.

A deep antipathy colors Eustacia's vision of the world and inflects the tone of the narrative that surrounds her with a latent but pregnant violence. Yet in a moment that emphasizes the role of disavowal in maintaining liberal equanimity, just a few pages before her death the narrator explicitly characterizes such violence as the projection of Eustacia's own psychological duress. "It was a night," the narrator explains, "which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world, on all that is terrible and dark in history and legend" (345). Thus there "never was harmony more perfect than between the chaos of [Eustacia's] mind and the chaos of the world

[17] In an odd but appropriate moment of twinning, Thomasin apparently also barely escapes spousal abuse at the hands of Wildeve. This is yet another instance of the repressed and repudiated violence that seems always latent in Hardy's work, but which the narrative seems to veer away from in the very moment in which the materialization of violence seems imminent.

without" (345). The narrator is emphatic that the synergy he describes is merely a product of Eustacia's tormented consciousness experiencing what he has earlier called the heath's propensity toward "reciprocity." The narrator continues on to compare Eustacia's perceptions of the heath with those of Thomasin Yeobright, in her homespun simplicity:

> To [Thomasin] there were not, as to Eustacia, demons in the air, and malice and scorpions, but prosy rain; Egdon in the mass was no monster whatever, but impersonal open ground. Her fears of the place were rational, her dislikes of its worst moods reasonable. (355)

Once again, the narrator establishes comparatively the diverging sensibilities of native and nonnative. Counterintuitively for the reader, here reason and rationality are characterized as being all on the side of the native, Thomasin. Though she is not of their class precisely, like the less enlightened natives of Egdon, in Thomasin's willingness to accept the given there is inherent compromise. As George Levine has shown, the imagined worlds of Thomas Hardy's chief protagonists tend to be structured precisely by their resistance to compromise (*Realistic Imagination* (230-231). Unlike Wildeve or Eustacia, and even Clym, who are all in one way or another unwilling to compromise their ambitions, her conciliations spare Thomasin from the worst pains of existence. Thomasin accepts her circumscription in a way that Eustacia cannot. Moreover, because Thomasin's "imagination [was] so actively engaged" "with the possibly disastrous events at her home," "the night and the weather had no terror beyond that of their actual discomfort and difficulty" (354). In this sense Thomasin is a more modern, rational version of Susan Nunsuch; as was the case for Susan, Thomasin's domestic connections, under duress as they are, anchor her amidst the "chaos of the world."

These important distinctions between Thomasin and Eustacia account for the apparently divergent cognitive states showcased by the narrative. They do not, however, explain the urgency with which the narrator consigns Eustacia's sense of the world's

imminent violence to the realm of irrationality. Here again we detect the narrator's familiar propensity to rationalize experience that we identified in the first pages of *The Return of the Native*; the narrator disavows the enmity and consequent fear that so palpably haunt Hardy's narratives. This tendency is strikingly apparent again in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, where the narrator's repudiation of the novel's latent violence is analogous to the above treatment of Eustacia. In a memorable passage from "Phase Two" of the novel, shortly after Tess returns to Marlott, the narrator stresses that the "encompassment of [Tess's] own characterization, based on shreds of convention, peopled by phantoms and voices antipathetic to her, was a sorry and mistaken creation of Tess's fancy—a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason" (67). Even among the denizens of the natural world, Tess "looked upon herself"—the language of reflection is certainly noteworthy—"as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of innocence" (67).

Hardy's narrator seeks to convince us that Tess's fear and guilt are merely projections of a deluded inner anxiety, a sort of *méconnaissance*: thus Tess "might have seen that what bowed her head so profoundly—the thought of the world's concern at her situation, was founded on an illusion" (71). She "might have seen" beyond her own mystification, though the narrator gives no indication as to just how such a penetrating objectivity is to made available to Tess. Hardy's narrative wants to direct our attention precisely to this impasse: the very process of Tess's mystification—the feedback loop of recognition that Hardy points to in the description of Tess's own "characterization"—renders the process itself opaque. No amount of reflection, Hardy wants us to see, will allow Tess to transcend the opacity that limits her self-perception. The crucial point is that Tess's sense of the world is correct; however much the narrator wants to deny the antipathy Tess feels, it clearly exists. So Tess, whose "whimsical fancy would intensify natural

processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story," is in fact not deluded or paranoid, for "the world," we see, "is only a psychological phenomenon, and what they seemed they were" (67). Thus, "the midnight airs and gusts, moaning amongst the tightly-wrapped buds and bark of the winter twigs," may as well in fact be "formulae of bitter reproach" (67). Tess is damned either way: if the threat Tess intuits is merely a psychological phenomenon, then she is apparently at the mercy of violence she has brought on herself; if the threat is real, then Tess is at the mercy of the violence of the world at large.

Yet Tess's apprehensions are entirely warranted; the violence she feels is a physical property of her environment. For despite the narrator's rebuke of Tess, the plot bears out the fact that Tess surely should fear "the cloud of moral hobgoblins" that "encompass her characterization." It finally does not matter that "society" itself, and not Tess, was "out of harmony with the actual world," it is to convention that she must comply, and with which, much like Eustacia, she is out of order. However, our narrator continues, "by feeling herself in antagonism, [Tess] was quite in accord" (67). There are many ways to read this nicely paradoxical offering from Hardy, but at bottom, I think, the statement is evasive: the fact that Tess's desire may bring her into harmony with an abstract conception of nature only serves to underscore her fate, which is to be perpetually in conflict with what *is*, that is, the all encompassing second nature of her social world. And this distinction will ultimately make the greatest difference in *Tess*. For the absolutely impersonal character of the "world" does not mute its inimical aspect, nor obviate the intimately violent impact that "mankind," "so terrible in the mass" finally has on Tess (66). Here Tess's fear, which is indivisible from her sense of humanity, communicates precisely the paradoxical import of Schmitt's unsettling assertion that "the concept of humanity excludes the concept of the enemy." Hardy's sense of human nature—of nature itself—will not support the notion of a universal

morality any more that it will a purposive nature. By excluding the concept of the enemy, and neutralizing the dynamics produced by concrete affiliations and loyalties, liberalism's universalizing impulse also excludes the concept of the friend.

Distance as Disavowal

The putative impersonality of the novelistic world Hardy builds in *Tess* rests entirely on a repudiation of interestedness, on distance and detachment. But Tess senses the violence disclaimed by the equivocal language of the rationalizing narrator. Tess imagines "numbers of tomorrows just all in a line, the first of them biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand further away; but they all seem fierce and cruel and as if they said, 'I'm coming! Beware of me! Beware of me!'" (97). Tess intuits the enmity that appears intrinsic to her world. Her future unfolds before her as the novel's bleak plot, the *natura naturans* of her existence. Seemingly like the immutable Heath of *The Return of the Native*, waiting, "unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crisis of so many things" (*Return* 10), Hardy's plots, though specifically nonteleological, are fearfully purposive. Gillian Beer described memorably the design of Hardy's novels as "maligned and entrapping, because designed without the needs of the individual life in mind" (*Darwin's Plots* 240). The fear generated by this "entrapping" second nature, as Beer has suggested, is itself understood to be atavistic by Victorian sensibilities; like the processes of exclusion I have been discussing, fear too is an anthropological survival. Fear and exclusion are symbiotic in Hardy, exclusion being at both the political and cognitive levels, a defensive, rationalizing response to fear.

The narrator's repudiation of Tess's fears, then, should be read as indicative of the Victorian disavowal that Beer's argument assumes; we might understand the narrative voice

as being at points the proxy of a Victorian sensibility, with its anxious need to maintain a certain cognitive stability and order. However, the recurrent violence of *Tess*, beginning with Alec's assault of Tess early in the novel, is finally incommensurate, Hardy tells us, with this "sense of order" (57). "Tess's own people," Hardy tells us, "never tired of saying among each other in their fatalistic way: 'It was to be'" (58). Yet this primitive fatalism, Hardy wants to suggest, is little different from the secularized theodicies, that is, the "sense of order" that constitutes Victorian bourgeois self-understanding, and to which Hardy's book is meant as a rebuke. Like the superstitions and fatalisms of Hardy's rustics, the illusion of man's progressive arc is itself dependent on a perspective supported by exclusion and disavowal. Finally the seminal difference may simply be one of proportion and perspective. In *The Return of the Native*, the heath dwellers ritually repudiate the "black chaos" of nature, with its "fiat" assuring "misery and death." By reducing "his daily life [to] a curious microscopic sort," Clym attempts to emulate a similar epistemology of occlusion that, ultimately, is no longer available to him. Conversely, modernity's self-understanding attempts to render the "black chaos" of "misery and death" insignificant by altering the scale, that is, by substituting the immediacy of human suffering with an abstract conceptualization of historical amelioration. It is only through the repudiation of nature's inexorable dominance of humanity that this comforting mythology can be reinforced.

Thus it is appropriate that *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* concludes with a stirring representation of violent exclusion and the repudiation that necessarily accompanies such violence in the world of the novel. As in all of Hardy's novels, in *Tess* violence both disrupts and maintains order. While the violence that Hardy shows to be embedded in human relations is successfully repudiated through much of the novel, once this violence erupts materially in Tess's murder of Alec, Tess's world is no longer indifferent nor impersonal, but

persecutorial. Tess and Angel themselves disclaim the facts of their plight, seeking in Bramhurst Court to attenuate existence and realize a protected space, "within [which] was affection, union, error forgiven" (308). But nonetheless, "outside was the inexorable" (308). We soon discover that in response to Tess's crime, "the whole country is reared" (312). That Tess's transgression is principally a trespass against a rational "sense of order," "to which man has long been accustomed," rather than against one man, is apparent even in the gait of those men sent to capture her, who materialize as if from nature, but "walk as if trained" and who "close in" on Tess "with evident purpose" (312). In their formalized propriety, as they wait for Tess to awaken, they conceal the violence inherent in "evident purpose." In their impersonality and distance, these men who pursue Tess, and who are ultimately her gravest enemies, are emblematic of her world's disavowed violence.

Consequently Tess's captors, who might seem out of place among the pagan trilithons, are entirely commensurate with what Hardy presents as its perceived history. As Tess lies on the pagan altar she asks Angel about the site's prehistoric occupants: "Did they sacrifice to God here?" Angel responds, "No"; he then qualifies, "I believe to the sun" (311). Hardy is here obviously pointing to the ritualized character of Tess's own imminent execution; again, we find that Hardy characterizes exclusionary violence as intrinsic to culture, primitive or modern. However, the analogy begs us to provide an answer to Tess's question: To whom, or what, is Tess herself to be sacrificed? Though the anthropological significance of the pagan setting to the history of England and the fabric of the novel itself is indisputably important for Hardy, and is rich with potential interpretation, Angel Clare's invocation of the sun as divinity surely alludes to Plato's treatment of the sun in *Republic*, a work in which Plato explicitly posits exclusion as both a political and epistemological strategy. As the Ur-trope of this Ur-text of the Western tradition, the Sun is at once the

Absolute Form of the Good and the ultimate symbol of human reason (and repression) through which lay the only avenue to the Absolute Good, or God. In this sense, the sacred abstraction to which Tess is sacrificed is not nearly as new as it is very, very old. Woman, Feeling, Nature—these metonyms of irrationality have long stood as impediments, as they do in Plato, to the provinces of truth, justice, and reason.

Whatever abstraction is apotheosized by culture, be it God or Reason or Justice, its continuity depends both on the existence of, and thus the disavowal or exclusion of, whatever is incommensurate with it: this is itself a cycle, Hardy wants us to recognize, that is interminable. For this reason, the novel ends not with Tess's hanging *per se*, but with the disavowal of the fact of Tess's killing and the initiation of a new cycle. The entirety of the curt final chapter is delivered from a point of view that is distanced and pictorial; Angel and Liza-Lu are explicitly compared to "Giotto's Two Apostles" as they climb "to the top of the great West Hill (313). Here, again, Hardy emphasizes the importance of perspective and proportion. From the "summit the prospect was almost unlimited," providing a view of the city of Wintoncester and the surrounding landscape as "in an isometric drawing" (313). So though distance provides a comprehensive view, the rationalized order presented, as if in an architectural rendering, is illusory precisely because it is dependent on a fixed and leveling position. Because any situated perspective occludes even as it illuminates, from the hilltop we are provided a vision that otherwise, apparently, would not be possible: the prison, "contrasting greatly by its formalism with the quaint irregularities of the" rest of the city, "disguised from the road by yews and evergreen oaks," "was visible enough" from the elevated perspective" (314).

Excluded from view by the "wall of this structure," as well as by the trees, the scene of Tess's execution is well hidden, visible only at the great distance from which it cannot of

course be comprehended. For though at the center of the scene, like a "blot on the city's beauty" is the "ugly flat-topped octagonal tower" of the prison, the anomaly of the prison tower betrays none of the travesty committed within, and contained by its walls:

> Upon the cornice of the tower a tall staff was fixed. Their eyes were riveted on it. A few minutes after the hour had struck something moved slowly up the staff, and extended itself upon the breeze. It was a black flag. "Justice" was done. (314)

With quotation marks herding the word "Justice," Hardy underscores his already quite clear ironic intent. Hardy's straightforward assertion that Tess's death is something other than justice once again calls attention to the power of analogy. Perhaps Hardy's point is not simply that Tess's execution should be called by another name, (for what is one to call it?). To assume that Hardy's strategy demands that the absent tenor of his metaphor be the opposite of his vehicle is only to reinforce the rationality of the identity making process. I think this is precisely the point: distinctions make all the difference in *Tess*. Tess's execution, endlessly obscured as it is, crystallizes the violent processes of rationalization and repudiation that Hardy sees as a hallmark of modernity. With the repudiated violence of the novel's conclusion, *Tess* again reproduces multiple processes of exclusion and deferral in an effort to reveal for the reader those regimes of disavowal inadequately masking the generalized violence that Hardy saw as a principal characteristic of Victorian culture.

POLITICS AND (IN)DECISION IN *THE SECRET AGENT*

"There exists no norm which is applicable to chaos"— Carl Schmitt[1]

In his indispensable *The Fiction of Autobiography*, Edward Said has argued for the presence of an essential epistemological insecurity in Joseph Conrad's fiction, a basic question, according to Said, which "runs throughout his [Conrad's] speculations": "does the mind seek order *or* truth?" (112). This fundamental cognitive impasse expresses itself in Conrad's political ambivalences and is particularly significant to his *The Secret Agent* (1907), a novel focused, at least overtly, on anarchy of both the political and cosmic varieties. For although the novel is populated by a "whole gang" of anarchists who would (could they only decide to) "make a clean sweep of the whole social creation," anarchy in *The Secret Agent* is perhaps best understood as a chiefly private condition developing from a largely public absence of authority.[2] Ironically, Conrad associates this absence of authority not only with the novel's motley cast of "terrorists," but principally with the developments of liberal democracy that are epitomized in the neutralized, and "denationalized" space of Conrad's London (119). By authority here I do not intend official political or juridical order, though certainly the power of the state does seem largely absent in the novel (when legal power does appear, say, in the persons of Inspector Heat or the Assistant Commissioner, that power is

[1] Schmitt, *Political Theology* 13.
[2] Conrad, *The Secret Agent* 28, 26. All subsequent citations are indicated parenthetically in the text.

privatized and thus rendered largely incoherent). These sorts of organizing powers count for little when compared to the common ideational commitments that for Conrad create community bonds and thus produce the shared meaning that underwrites agency and responsibility. Instead, missing in *The Secret Agent* is that authority deriving from a sense of affiliation, or that "national sentiment, the preservation of which," Conrad once told Cunningham Graham, "is my concern" (G. Jean-Aubry 269)

In the same letter to Graham, written not long after the publication of *Heart of Darkness* in 1899, Conrad expressed a complex vision of man's political motivations:

> L'homme est un animal méchant. Sa mechanceté doit être organisée. La crime est une condition nécessaire de l'existence organisée. La société est essentiellement criminelle—ou elle n'existerait pas. C'est l'egoisme qui sauve tout—absolument tout—tout ce que nous abhorrons, tout ce que nous aimons.[3]

Political organization is essentially "criminal," for there would be no law, no need for centralization, were there no need to pen in man's inherently "evil nature." "Egoism" for Conrad suggests the internal means by which the agent makes what is exterior to him conform to his beliefs, or the shared understanding of the group to which he is a partisan. Egoism is the principal of organization, a decisive impetus toward an idea that demands not mere "fraternity," as Conrad writes in the same letter, but "abnegation" (G. Jean-Aubry 269). "Self-sacrifice means something," for Conrad precisely because self-sacrifice creates meaning (G. Jean-Aubry 269). As opposed to liberal cosmopolitanism's sacralization of self-assertive individualism, for Conrad the cultivation of a national belief, and the commitment to a

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[3] Ibid 269. "Man is a wicked animal. His evil nature must be organized. Crime is a necessary condition of that organized existence. Society is essentially criminal—otherwise it would not exist. It is egoism that salvages everything—absolutely everything—all that we abhor as well as all that we love." The translation is mine. Lewis (and others) translate "suave" as "preserve"; I think "salvage" is more true to Conrad's intent not only because salvage connotes rescue, but also because this translation captures the sense of futurity that the use of preserve does not, which has a more conservative and static connotation.

national idea in a sort of Burkean sense, mitigates the epistemological indeterminacy that he associated with liberal democracy, and which is expressed in every aspect of *The Secret Agent*. As Pericles Lewis has recently suggested, Conrad treated "faith in the nation-state as the necessary corollary of a belief in the fundamentally egoistic and individualistic character of human nature" (104). The cultivation of national sentiment in this way poses a particular opportunity for salvaging the individual agent.

However, viewed from this angle, Conrad's negative anthropology ("L'homme est un animal méchant") of a fallen humanity that can only be redeemed through its political organization ("Sa mechanceté doit être organisée") takes on a distinctly theological aspect. That Conrad's political speculations have theological underpinnings is perhaps not surprising, given that he was raised on the national messianism of Poland's romantic literature.[4] However, this feature of Conrad's thinking becomes more complex, as I argue in the pages that follow, once we take into account his critique of political theology in *The Secret Agent*. Conrad's critical evaluation of the various political orientations in the novel, for all their putative differences, demonstrates their structural similarities. For one, they are all eschatological. "The will to use the means"—a central thematic of the novel—implies an end, and thus a *telos* (54). Even the "sacrosanct fetish" of the middle classes—the faith in science—is understood progressively: "They believe that in some mysterious way science is at the source of their material prosperity" (27). Additionally, each also depends on violence. Compassion for "humanity," we find, is either immediately transformed into rage and blind violence, as with Stevie or anarchists like Karl Yundt, or violence becomes an instrument used to incite compassion and thereby engender more violence, as in the case of Vladimir and the Professor. Karl Yundt, for example, dreams of "no pity for anything on earth, and

[4] See Lester 4-17.

death enlisted for good and all in the service of humanity" (34). That the sentiments of this "moribund murderer" are expressed as parody, given the ironic economy of the novel, only makes their general applicability all the more telling. *The Secret Agent* ultimately demonstrates the universal relevance of what Carl Schmitt called modernity's "secret law," whereby "the most terrible inhumanity [is] pursued only in the name of humanity" (*Concept of the Political* 95).

Though not overtly political in any specific or partisan sense, the absences of authority in the novel, including the absence of any centralized narrative authority, have distinct political expression. Much of the difficulty of decoding that marks the novel has its origin in those conflicts of signification that are the hallmark of *The Secret Agent's* narrative approach. Conrad famously commented on the novel's composition, writing that "the purely artistic purpose, that of applying an ironic method to a subject of that kind, was formulated with deliberation and in the earnest belief that ironic treatment alone would enable me to say all I felt I would have to say in scorn as well as in pity."[5] Hayden White has written of irony's affinity with "the rhetorical figure of *aporia*," which "could be considered the favored stylistic device of ironic language" (*Metahistory* 37). Irony expresses a self-conscious skepticism regarding language's ability to express a thing or an idea other than in negative terms, that is, through the systematic negation of that thing or idea. Paradoxically, then, the skepticism intrinsic to the ironic method is precisely what is required of representation made, as Conrad said, in "earnest belief." The narrator's constant modulations between concepts and their negations makes it difficult to imagine a point from which fixed meaning might be created in the novel, and in this way the novel reproduces the very epistemological dilemmas that it attempts to illuminate. It is by way of cognitive

[5] Conrad, "1920 Author's Note," *The Secret Agent* 251

impasses and aporiae that *The Secret Agent* seeks to represent the incoherencies and general indecisiveness of the liberal democracy with which the novel contends.

From *The Secret Agent's* indeterminate narrative position the crises of political liberalism play out in the confusion, fear, and repressed violence that permeates democratically, one might say, this novel without a protagonist. Conrad has said of the democratic ideal, that it is a "beautiful phantom," an "illusion which imposes by its size alone" (Jean-Aubry 269). The problems of imposing scale and formlessness that here are characteristic of democracy for Conrad recur as a striking motif of *The Secret Agent*. As was the case for his near contemporary Carl Schmitt, Conrad understood the democratic ideal as intrinsically and inherently opposed to authority; liberal democracy lacks the sovereign center from which political identity derives. Democracy and its early twentieth-century iteration, cosmopolitanism, present to their constituency—humanity as a totality—loyalties that are so attenuated as to be almost nonexistent. In this way liberal democracy is associated in the novel with the demise of forms of affiliation that produce concrete connections and thus stable identities—organizing principles that are obviously lacking in *The Secret Agent*. The novel is Conrad's most developed and explicit treatment of the phenomenon that in my last chapter on Thomas Hardy I have called the neutralization of affiliation. Rather than the consensual, shared understandings that putatively sustain liberalism, *The Secret Agent* presents a social milieu characterized by private interests, mistrust, and secret conflict, in other words, a world commensurate with what Carl Schmitt calls political romanticism, the salient figure in which is the "solitary individual, whose absolute stance toward himself gives a world in which nothing is connected to anything else."[6] Conrad's own understanding of the cultural crisis facing England at the turn of the twentieth century presages Carl Schmitt's trenchant

[6] Tracy B. Strong, "Foreword," *The Concept of the Political* xv.

criticisms of liberalism generated barely fifteen years after the publication of *The Secret Agent*. Yet, *The Secret Agent* enfolds into its critique of liberal democracy and the liberal legitimation crisis it depicts a prescient awareness of the dangers of the national faith that the novel at the same time recommends as ameliorative. Out of Conrad's negative formal method comes not only a parody of the liberal irresolution epitomized in his portrayal of English society, nor merely a critique of the generalized but disavowed violence inherent in the democratic idea; Conrad's novel ultimately also delivers a scathing appraisal of the sovereign exception, "the will to use the means" that Carl Schmitt understood as the only means by which the instabilities and indecision of liberal democracy could be resolved.

Neutralization and Disaffiliation

Conrad addresses the failures of liberalism in terms that, prior to Carl Schmitt, are frankly Schmittian. His *Heart of Darkness*, for example, had illustrated precisely Schmitt's assertion that "the concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion" (*Concept of the Political* 54). Similarly Conrad demonstrates in *The Secret Agent* that violence and the cruelty inhere, even flourish, in the sacred egalitarian ideals of cosmopolitan humanism. Conrad understood that the concept of humanity excludes the idea of the friend precisely because in its essence the concept of humanity seeks to neutralize identity, which it does, according to Schmitt, by excluding "the concept of the enemy" (*Concept of the Political* 54). For this reason, humanity is not a political concept; its political content is neutralized by its essential negation of the friend/enemy antithesis. Once the concept is essentially neutralized, it can be appropriated and used parasitically by whatever interest makes claim to it. In *The Secret Agent* Conrad is concerned that precisely in the absence of concrete affiliations capable of providing political identity, that is, in a world of

neutralized affiliations, it is enmity that becomes universalized, and not a beneficent cosmopolitan sense of humanity.

In Conrad's only London-centered novel, there exists no palpable, shared public organization capable of producing meanings that can then be translated into private truths and thereby become the impetus for political belief. When at one point the Assistant Commissioner visits an "Italian restaurant," for instance, he finds that its constituency is "unstamped" and "denationalized" (119). But even very early on in the novel we see this absence of sharable meanings reflected in the novel's setting, which itself seems incapable of producing cogent and shareable meaning:

> With a turn to the left Mr. Verloc pursued his way along a narrow street by the side of a yellow wall which, for some inscrutable reason, had No. I Chesham written on it in black letters. Chesham Square was at least sixty yards away, and Mr. Verloc, cosmopolitan enough not to be deceived by London's topographical mysteries, held on steadily, without a surprise or indignation. At last, with business like persistency, he reached the Square, and made diagonally for number 10. This belonged to an imposing carriage gate in a high, clean wall between two houses, of which one rationally enough bore number 9 and the other was numbered 37; but the fact that this last belonged to Porthill Street, a street well known in the neighborhood, was proclaimed by an inscription placed above the ground floor window by whatever highly efficient authority is charged with the duty of keeping track of London's strayed houses. (12)

We see that the world of *The Secret Agent* exists beyond the limits of consensus, and thus irresolution is reflected in the metropolitan landscape itself. Moreover, indecision is here linked explicitly to the failures of bureaucracy and parliamentary procedure. A rather light-hearted, Dickensian irony (reminiscent of Dickens's endless critique of the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit*) recommends that whatever "highly efficient authority" has failed, this lapse ought to be remedied "by Parliament," "(a short act would do)"; just why the failure has not been remedied "is one of the mysteries of Municipal administration" (12). Though Conrad will continue to take ironic aim at parliamentary indecisiveness throughout the novel, the passage here subtly introduces concerns of a more immediate and, as it were, existential

variety. A surfeit of external markers notwithstanding, public signs generate no viable meanings, marking an absence that suggests a central problem of the novel: the challenge of deciphering, and thus of inducing order from an array of disjoined signs and actions.[7] However ironically intended, the "cosmopolitan" Verloc is a sort of cipher, the "celebrated agent Δ" (appropriately, "delta" is the mathematical symbol for flux, or change—or indecision) (22). Thus like Verloc himself, who "in his general get-up might have been anything from a picture-frame maker to a locksmith," Conrad's London exudes a "moral nihilism," a general devaluation or absence of meaning where meaning ought to exist (11). In this way the novel's setting reproduces the ironic operations of the novel itself, which proceeds through a logic of negation, continuously gesturing toward not merely the absence of authority, but also to the persistence of suffering that characterizes a highly rationalized society. The style of the novel itself suggests the vacillation and indeterminacy that Conrad associates with liberal society. *The Secret Agent*, like the London it depicts, is a "cruel devourer of light"; in its penchant for deferral and persistent irony, the novel reflects the fearful indecision of the liberal democracy it depicts.

Verloc is "cosmopolitan enough," however, not to be "deceived" by London's confused topography; instead he is forced into a synergy with its irrational organization and "inscrutable reasons." In doing so Verloc only reproduces the logic of the environment of which he is a part, which "could with every propriety be described as private." And like all the characters in *The Secret Agent*, Verloc devises a cognitive means of navigating the "inscrutable" logic of the world around him, one that is not available to the reader: he "did

[7] Charles Jones writes, "much of the novel's strength and attractiveness lies in the shifting of the reader's viewpoint brought about by his uncertainty of the nature of the linguistic data confronting him—i.e., whether it represents the author's narration, a particular character's direct or reported utterance, or a mixture of all three." Quoted in Hawthorn, 43.

not trouble his head about it" (12). Verloc is "cosmopolitan enough," sufficiently accustomed to confusions, to disclaim his association with it. This propensity for privacy and disavowal in *The Secret Agent* is born of forms of fear. On the one hand, there exists a fear of knowing and feeling; there is a tendency to disavow or refute rather than decode the data with which one is confronted. Exemplary here is Winnie's "philosophy," which "consisted in not taking notice of the inside of facts," or Sir Ethelred's mantra, "only no details, pray" (123, 109). On the other hand, fear besets those who are confronted by the disorder and absences of meaning that Conrad's characters seem to share sympathetically with their surroundings. For instance Verloc is "mute and hopelessly inert in his fear of darkness" (49).

> He leaned his forehead against the cold window-pane—a fragile film of glass stretched between him and the enormity of cold, black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man. Mr. Verloc felt the latent unfriendliness of all out of doors with a force approaching a positive bodily anguish. (45)

Verloc's lack of inertia is symptomatic of the general torpor and inactivity of the novel, in which very little actually happens. The sublime "accumulation," characterized here by a catalogue of compounded adjectives, disjointed from their nouns, signifies Verloc's inability to formalize "the enormity" of the confusion that confronts him. The terror induced by what exceeds the mind's organizing capacity is recursive in the novel, for example in the existential "nausea" that is Inspector Heat's visceral response to the "nameless heap of fragments" formally known as Stevie or in the Professor's deep fear of "the immense multitude" of mankind" (70; 65). Constellations of fear in *The Secret Agent* originate from the epistemological insecurities notable even in the physical appearances of its constituency.

In its negative purposiveness, Conrad's London expresses a hidden knot of forces and agencies that exceed the ken of man. And this incomprehensibility is mirrored in the

cultivated anonymity of the populace. Opacity in *The Secret Agent* derives from an apparent overabundance of external characteristics, a sort of masking mechanism that reflects only surface, never offering depth. Thus the Assistant Commissioner finds that like "little Italian restaurant's" "fraudulent cookery," "the patrons of the place had [also] lost all of their national and private characteristics" (118). "These people," the Assistant Commissioner observes of the restaurant patrons,

> were as denationalized as the dishes set before them with every circumstance of unstamped respectability. Neither was their personality stamped in any way, professionally, socially or racially. They seemed created for the Italian restaurant, unless the Italian restaurant had perchance been created for them. But the last hypothesis was unthinkable, since one could not place them anywhere outside those special circumstances. (118-119)

The Assistant Commissioner hardly experiences here "that remarkable confidence in anonymity," which Benedict Anderson has said, "is the hallmark of the modern nation."[8] Indeed he seems rather frustrated, even repulsed. The Assistant Commissioner's "considerable gifts for the detection of incriminating truth" notwithstanding, his "peculiar instinct," can make out nothing of the indiscriminate cosmopolitan mass that surrounds him (94). The important scene at the Italian restaurant exposes both the difficulties of identification in a postnational milieu, that is, the limitations on the processes of recognition and reciprocity on which identity construction depends and the mildly threatening forms of liberation that are the result of these limitations: "It was impossible to form a precise idea of what occupations they [the restaurant patrons] followed by day and where they went to bed at night. And he himself had become unplaced. It would have been impossible for anybody to guess his occupation" (119). Significantly, the Assistant Commissioner's own cultivated anonymity is a product, a reflection, of the anonymity of his surroundings: reciprocity is

[8] Benedict Anderson 36.

curtailed, leaving "personality unstamped." As in the passage I described at the beginning of this section, in which Verloc is seen to operate on the terms of his surroundings, the Assistant Commissioner also complies with his environment. Earlier described as "a square peg forced into a round hole," the Assistant Commissioner too begins to loose his "sharply angular shape" (91). The Assistant Commissioner is subsumed by the denationalized mass: because reciprocity is curtailed, identification is short-circuited, and an amorphous impersonality propagates like a contagion. The Assistant Commissioner, catching his reflection "on the sheet of glass" is thus himself "struck by his foreign appearance" (118).

Described as appearing "foreign" at several points in the novel, the Assistant Commissioner is in this way identified with his quarry, the agents of continental governments and "foreign embassies." On the one hand, this is exemplary of how the novel exhibits, as A. Michael Matin has shown, a distinct anxiety about the threat of invasion, which is linked overtly with its concerns regarding English denationalization.[9] On the other hand, this apparent manifestation of Conrad's negative method in the novel seems to put the Assistant Commissioner under a state of erasure, of nonidentity. Conrad's destabilization of the Assistant Commissioner's generic position in the novel is exemplary of how *The Secret Agent* resists the formal structure provided by the moral and legal juxtaposition of what is lawful and criminal.[10] In fact quite the opposite is true; this sort of order escapes the egalitarian world that is Conrad's subject in the novel. One of the principal structural ironies of the novel, what Cedric Watts has called its ruling "covert plot" (34), is that the methods

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[9] A. Michael Matin, "'We Aren't German Slaves Here, Thank God': Conrad's Transposed Nationalism and the British Literature of Espionage and Invasion," *Journal of Modern Literature* 21. 2 (1998): 251-280.

[10] This is entirely appropriate to what we might understand as Conrad's homage to the Victorian detective story. Here is no extrarational Holmes, or even an Inspector Bucket, to anchor the narrative in the stabilizing Victorian conventionalities of its author.

of the anarchists who oppose the liberal state, and the authorities that ostensibly work to protect the liberal state, are not only "counter moves in the same game," as the Professor elaborates, but "at bottom identical" (56). The putative opposition of crime and legalism represents a synergy of interests that proves the *sine qua non* of their respective existences. Yet by demonstrating them to be structurally the same the novel deconstructs this opposition and thus emphasizes that in the neutralized world of *The Secret Agent*, one cannot really tell friend from enemy.

(In)decision and the Temporal Demiurge

Conrad's allegorical London is exemplary of what Carl Schmitt called depoliticized society. For Schmitt, depoliticization is not merely analogous with, but actually a special sort of anarchy: a state of internal disorder growing out of the absence left behind as one form of political order is displaced by another: "in the dialectic of such a development one creates a new domain of struggle precisely through the shifting of the central domain" of conflict and struggle (*Concept of the Political* 50). In Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus*,' the becalmed *Narcissus* exemplifies depoliticization precisely: in this national allegory, the need to protect the *Narcissus* and combat the sea creates a centripetal energy capable of producing forms of heroism among the crew, but once the loyalty-inducing crises fades, the crew becomes "over-civilized" and riven by the divergent interests threatening to destroy the ship. The world of *The Secret Agent* is very much an extension of this concept for Conrad; intriguingly it is to the capital of English homeland itself where the national ideal comes to die. The depoliticized space, particularly as it is back-filled by the "so-called politically neutral economic domain," is marked by "possessive individualism" in which the agent "acts as an individual against the totality": "He is a man who finds his compensation for his political

nullity in the fruits of freedom and enrichment and above all in the total security of its use. Consequently he wants to be spared bravery and exempted from the danger of a violent death" (*Concept of the Political* 63). This gives a fair description, I think, of the bourgeois sensibility that is in many ways the subject of Conrad's novel. This situation is exemplified not only by its amplification of private interests, but also by a generalized propensity toward conflict. For "at the very centre of the Empire on which the Sun never sets," as Conrad describes London in the novel, if human relations have not actually regressed to a "war of all against all," they are nonetheless epitomized by enmity and mistrust.

Conrad's vision of the merits of affiliation exists always within the flux of moral paradox forced upon his personalities by the novelistic circumstances to which they are subjected. At the end of *Lord Jim*, for example, Marlow wonders hopefully, "whether at the last he [Jim] had confessed to a faith mightier than the laws of order and progress" (201). For Avrom Fleischman, Jim's evidently cowed submission to Doramin is an act of self-sacrifice that transcends "the particular historical context" allied with "the meliorist ideal of Western civilization"; instead the act speaks of a "genuine social community" and shows that a "commitment to social progress allows the individual to discover himself in the community formed or improved by his efforts" (111). Fleischman's reading, however, seems to too readily make Conrad's novel amenable to a scenario in which not only self-sacrifice, but also atavistic violence is politically ameliorative. Though Conrad surely offers this possibility in the events of Jim's death, I am given to approaching Conrad's indeterminacies always with a sense of the negation embedded in his greater ironies. After all, Marlow's dictum, "I affirm nothing," can be given either a diffuse or a definitively negative reading. The Patusani community's demand for Jim's life is simply too disturbing an event of the novel and the ritual scapegoat a far too familiar political theological concept to give in completely to

Fleischman's reading. Conrad never provides a possible resolution without also offering the negation of that possibility, and the end of *Lord Jim* is exemplary in this sense. Thus I am more comfortable with J. Hillis Miller's claim that *Lord Jim*, "has no visible thematic or structuring principle which will allow the reader to find its secret…untie its knots and straighten its threads" (*Fiction and Repetition* 25). Miller's reading is particularly true of the novel's ending, where even the violent decision breeds indecision and is thus unable to provide the aesthetic closure that both Marlow and the reader seek.

Nonetheless, the problem of accountability, of taking responsibility, is a central one in Conrad. *Lord Jim*, for example, goes well beyond a juridical conceptualization of responsibility, which the novel sloughs off with its early, official inquest of Jim. Geoffrey Harpham has written that Conrad's novels are structured, "in a way essentially repugnant to the juridical mind, around a principle of negation that is not simply the other side of a positive center, but the center itself" (59). Certainly this is true of *The Secret Agent*, a world in which the will formation of the populace itself is meant to produce authority, but in which instead the centrifugal energies of divergent human interests attest to a vacuous lack of central authority. Decisions, when they do happen in *The Secret Agent*, never penetrate the surface, so to speak; actions in the novel seem only to proceed from individual cognitive and conative necessity. Likewise legality and responsibility are always viewed, in *The Secret Agent*, through the prism of instrumentality and private interests. For all its putative emphasis on crime and the detection of crime, in *The Secret Agent* legalism is approached only marginally, and then only through the purposeful confusion created by the novel's ironic presentation of persons and events, and their mutual indecision.

The outstanding attribute of Conrad's middle classes is their lack of commitment and belief, and thus, for Conrad, their limited character. The Professor, though a miserable,

atrophied human being by any measure, true to the logic of Conrad's narrative, is nonetheless a man of some (albeit insane) character: "In the last instance it is character alone that makes for one's safety…There are few people in the world whose character is as well established as my own" (54). Given the narrator's merciless treatment of "this obviously miserable organism," we are tempted to think that the power the Professor feels vested in his "force of personality" is merely a delusion of grandeur (which it surely is, but that is not all it is), yet his encounter with Inspector Heat will nonetheless demonstrate that there is an extrinsic, operative authority to the Professor, which derives precisely from the arbitrary violence he symbolizes (54). For the Professor knowledge is power, in that if his enemy is aware of his violence, then he has power over that enemy (conversely, this is why he fears the masses—because they do not know enough to fear him). Consequently, when and where it counts, he finds "effective" the "belief those people have in my will to use the means" (54).

> They depend on life, which, in this connection, is a historical fact surrounded by all sorts of restraints and considerations, a complex organized fact open to attack at every point; whereas I depend on death, which knows no restraint and cannot be attacked. My superiority is evident. (55)

Because the Professor depends on death, and not on life, he views himself as outside of the conventional order; the Professor, like the sovereign exception, is "not subsumable" to the norm. Heat describes "the anarchists" as "no class—no class at all," but his qualitative slight registers also as an inability to classify, or categorize, the anarchists, and most especially the Professor. Nonetheless, though he is extrinsic to the normative order, through a sort of negative power, his very existence induces a type of norm. This is most clear in the Professor's opposition to Inspector Heat, who tells the anarchist: "If I were to lay hands on you now, I would be no better than yourself" (76). In a moment of supreme irony, we find that the Professor, the "perfect anarchist," is the exception. Thus the one whose existence is

dedicated to the destruction of order and is devoted to destroying any centralized authority has assumed the role of sovereign for himself. At least in his mind, it is he, the Professor, who decides. So paradoxically he is precisely what he himself seeks to eradicate. He has said he does not play the "game" (56, 76), but the Professor surely does, and his gambit is that by being the exception, he hopes to induce the state of exception.

The Professor, like the other anarchists the novel parodies, is only a more extreme example of the generally deformed humanity that issues from the society Conrad presents in the novel, a fact evident in the stunted moral capacity of all the novel's characters. Son of a "delicate dark enthusiast with a sloping forehead" (thus by Ossipon's Lambrosian calculus, the Professor's father ranks as yet another of the novels "degenerates") who had been "an itinerant and rousing preacher of some obscure but rigid Christian sect," "science" had for the Professor "replaced thoroughly the faith of conventicles, this moral attitude translated itself into a frenzied puritanism of ambition" (64). The Professor's "ambition" is "secularly holy," a political theological "creed" (65). Once "thwarted," this ambition becomes a seething and purposeful *ressentiment* toward a social order "whose morality was artificial, corrupt and blasphemous" (64). Yet by demonstrating that he depends on the narrative of "the weak, whose theology has invented hell for the strong" (meaning, of course, the Professor), he shows himself as structurally identical to the middle classes who he despises. In his unbending desire to "destroy public faith in legality" and shatter "the framework of an established social order" (the very same social order from which he of course is the issue), the Professor again demonstrates the eschatology form which he derives meaning.

At the beginning of Chapter 5 the Professor exits the Silenus ruminating on the failure of the Greenwich bomb plot:

> It was vain to pretend to himself he wasn't disappointed. But that was a mere feeling; the stoicism of his thought could not be disturbed by this or any other

> failure. Next time, or the time after next, a telling stroke would be delivered—something really startling—a blow fit to open the first crack in the imposing front of the great edifice of legal conceptions sheltering the atrocious injustice of society. (64)

Like Mr. Vladimir, who is attempting through violence to induce a "cure" for England's "sentimental regard for individual liberty" (20-21), the professor waits for that one decisive action. So, too, does the reader: the passage is exemplary of the manner in which the narrator's perspective integrates with those consciousnesses it observes, presenting the reader with an often challenging interpretive situation—with interpretive indecision, as it were. Jeremy Hawthorn, however, dissents: "at the same time we think and experience with the Professor, we also inspect his beliefs with disdain and contempt"; the novel combines "extreme flexibility and mobility of perspective with consistency of moral, ideological, and political viewpoint"; thus "we are never confused by the shifts in narrative" (43). For Hawthorn, apparently, Conrad's narrative method is bent on producing consensus though a centralized authority, just like the liberal ideology it parodies. Still, given the passage in question, and the procedures of the novel more generally, I find Hawthorn's assessment unconvincing. While not exhibiting the radical inconsistencies of person the reader experiences, for example, in *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, the narrator of *The Secret Agent* does exhibit enough inconsistency of personality, as Jakob Lothe has shown, that the reader must consider his viewpoint as always suspect, as subject to the same fluctuations of psychology and perception as those characters the narrator himself presents to the reader.[11] So while on the one hand it is clear that we are meant to find laughable the Professor's faith in anarchism's ability to affect the "edifice of legal conceptions," and certainly deride his means, it is far from a ridiculous notion that legal conceptions shelter "the atrocious injustice of society." In fact, the synergy of putatively opposed concepts like justice and injustice is

[11] See Loethe 253-259

one of many unresolvable contradictions from which the novel derives its ironic energy.

Appropriate to the commitment to individualism that is the essence of liberal society, Conrad's middle classes do not fear *for* anything; they lack, unlike the Professor for example, any idea of "transcendental" significance, a commitment to which, along with "force of personality," provides "character" (54-55). Along with its "absurd" and "sentimental regard for individual liberty," Vladimir had characterized England as above all secular: its "sacrosanct fetish is science." However, Vladimir's phrasing paradoxically portrays science in terms of religious devotion; a sort of faith in the absence of faith. This new secular religion, however, clearly does more harm than good in the novel—and the Professor's fanaticism is exemplary of religious fervor transformed by science. The Professor is typified by his deep faith in a sort of insane, anarchic messianism; however, the "coming," as it were, of a new historical moment "of madness and despair" (244) hinges on the violent decision, a "telling stroke" that the Professor ironically cannot seem to make for himself. He consoles himself in precisely the same manner as those whom he despises and awaits the "next time, or the time after next." For though the Professor dismisses Ossipon and the other "revolutionists" as mere "slaves of the social condition," and thus of one piece with the society they ostensibly wish to destroy, we see that the Professor is also a slave. Within the ironic economy of Conrad's novel, the progressive logic of the Professor's madness is organized by a sort of corrupt rationality, clearly also a product of the "madness and despair" that is the here and now of liberal society. Thus the Professor's eschatological bent parodies both the rational teleology of an earlier Victorian historical self-understanding (such as the one epitomized by Inspector Heat) as well as those loosely Marxist revolutionaries who, like Karl Yundt and Michaelis, are not men "of action," but instead also wait for "something conclusive" (55). As with the Professor, the theological character of their

politics is clear: Michaelis, "made again the confession of his faith, mastering him irresistible and complete like an act of grace: the secret of fate discovered in the material side of life; the economic condition of the world responsible for the past and shaping the future; the source of all history, of all ideas" (36).

Conrad extends his critique of political theological eschatology and the historical self-understanding that undergirds it to the function of time in several specific instances of indecision and temporal deferral. For example, told of the explosives the Professor always carries on his person, Comrade Ossipon seeks assurance that the detonator is "instantaneous, of course?"

> "Far from it," confessed the other, with a reluctance which seemed to twist his mouth dolorously. "A full twenty seconds must elapse from the moment I press the ball till the explosion takes place."
> "Phew!" Whistled Ossipon, completely appalled. "Twenty seconds! Horrors! You mean to say you could face that? I should go crazy—" (53)

Bemused by his response, the Professor criticizes Ossipon for his evident allergy to resolution: "You see, you can't even bear the mention of something conclusive" (55). Yet from the dolorous "twist" of the Professor's expression, it is quite clear that he too recognizes that irresolution is "the weak point of this special system" (53). The detonator, the symbolic instrument of exceptional violence, is itself marred by indecision. Even at the most minute level, the anarchist is subject to the mechanical order of the device, and the organizing principles of what the narrator will a few moments later refer to as "the vulgar conception" of time (70). Having rejected religion, we see that the Professor is still waiting for science to deliver on its promise. In his efforts to solve this problem, the "perfect anarchist" falls more deeply into an eschatological orientation, which in the Professor's speech takes the shape of a twisted perfectionist teleology: the Professor seeks relief in the "perfect detonator," a "variable and yet perfectly precise mechanism…a really intelligent

detonator" (54-55). Paradoxically, in his desire to overcome the ordering principle of time, the Professor, like everyone else in the novel, is left needing more time: "But the time! The Time! Give me time!" (240).

Insight and (In)decision

Within the complex symbolic economy of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, the loss of identity is associated with either a sense of freedom, as in the case of the Assistant Commissioner, or more generally with the terror of death. The novel dramatizes the erasure of identity as the (often violent) interpenetration of materials animate and inanimate, the most stirring example of which is Inspector Heat's postmortem inspection of Stevie's remains. Viewing the "heap of nameless fragments," which had just been cleaned from the street, Inspector Heat notes: "'You used a shovel,' observing a sprinkling of small gravel, tiny brown bits of bark, and particles of splintered wood as fine as needles (70). Heat's detached reflection demonstrates the Inspector's rationalism and professional powers of induction; however, the gruesome evidence of physical obliteration nonetheless elicits a profound horror that threatens Heat's practiced decorum:

> The Chief Inspector, stooping guardedly over the table, fought down the unpleasant sensation in his throat. The shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty, though his reason told him the effect must have been as swift as a flash of lightning. The man, whoever he was, had died instantaneously; and yet it seemed impossible to believe that a human body could have reached that state of disintegration without passing though pangs of inconceivable agony. No physiologist, and still less of a metaphysician, Chief Inspector Heat rose by the force of sympathy, which is a form of fear, above the vulgar conception of time. Instantaneous! (70)

Because of Conrad's penchant for what Ian Watt has called "delayed decoding," neither Heat nor the reader (though we may suspect it) yet knows the identity of the ill-fated

bomber: he is in fact a "heap of nameless fragments."[12] The nausea and horror that overwhelms Heat is a product of sympathy, a "form of fear" in Conrad because, as in Adam Smith's classic writings on the moral sentiments, one's sense of the other is inextricably tied to one's sense of self and the human impetus toward self-preservation.[13] Sympathy in Conrad is a distinct form of vanity, a concept that has complex and contradictory implications for the modes of moral agency he presents in his fiction. Sympathy is the product of an imaginative recourse to our own experience made possible through processes of identification, i.e., sympathy is a feeling dependent on what we know of joy or pain; consequently sympathy has always a second-order relation to the suffering of the other. "Though our brother is upon the rack," Smith writes famously, "our sense will never inform us of what he suffers."[14] Ironically, however, Heat finds himself entered into the processes of identification with the heap of human remains before him, which reflects the unwonted knowledge of his own fragility. The sublimity with which "the shattering violence of destruction" confronts Heat's imagination, though briefly muted by his professional detachment, is nonetheless quite enough to affect "his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty."

However, if Heat's sympathetic response begins as a reaction to the immediate and very particular instance of death by which he is confronted here, his sense of its significance rapidly becomes abstract and universalized: "The shattering violence of destruction which had made of that body a heap of nameless fragments affected his feelings with a sense of ruthless cruelty, though his reason told him the effect must have been as swift as a flash of

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[12] For Watt on delayed decoding, see *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century* 169.
[13] "It is from this very illusion of our imagination, that the foresight of our own dissolution is so terrible to us, which can undoubtedly give us no pain when we are dead, makes us miserable when we are alive." Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* 18.
[14] Ibid 13.

lightning." This transition toward the general significance of the event is aided by the absence of a particular identity; the "heap of nameless fragments," mingling with the inanimate material as it does, indicates something more universal about human susceptibility to pain and suffering. Like the immediate object of "destruction" lying before Heat, the source of "ruthlessness and cruelty" is also unknown. The first clause of the sentence is grammatically unclear ("ruthlessness and cruelty" modifies Heat's "feelings"—his "sense" of the equally vague and autonomous "shattering violence" that ultimately acts as the agent of the sentence) and leaves no definite sense of the origin of such violence. Moreover, the gerund "shattering," though primarily adjectival, nonetheless lends a progressive, ineluctable feel to the violence that has thrust itself upon Heat's consciousness.

Heat intimates a systemic or cosmological sense of terror and violence. For while in point of fact the "destruction," as we know, is the product of the Professor's violent alchemy, Stevie's misstep suggests humanity's vulnerability to, rather than its control of, the destructive element in nature. Inspector Heat's aesthetic revulsion registers this universal sense even as he views the particular, immediate evidence of a violent and diremptive loss of identity that, ostensibly, has no significance. Indeed the "stolid" constable's eyewitness account of the explosion, "like a heavy flash of lightning in the fog," recalls another moment in Conrad, namely Marlow's description in *Heart of Darkness* of the nearly two thousand years of British history: "like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker." (3). To Inspector Heat, whose "mind was inaccessible to ideas of revolt," this intimation of the disorder existing beyond the assumed progressive order that an historical consciousness impresses on the natural world would be nothing short of vertiginous. Yet countering the dizzying sense of what Ian Watt called Conrad's "astrophysical pessimism," reason comes to Heat's aid: "reason told him [Inspector Heat] the effect must have been as swift as a flash of

lightning" (153). Heat conceptualizes the event in the same manner as the constable, but here to obviate the need for sympathy by encasing apparent "agony" in divisions of time so infinitesimal that they escape the human mind's power to register that agony: "Instantaneous!" This is the second clause of the sentence, the first describing Heat's horror. The proximity of the two clauses, and their sequencing, gestures grammatically to the dialectical immediacy with which reason, as a cognitive response to what exceeds the mind's powers of comprehension, attempts to give form to the unformed—to preempt chaos by inducing order. Heat is confronted by an overwhelming sense of what exceeds the mind's categorical impulses; he is faced with that problem of scale, which as we have seen, recurs throughout the novel. Sympathy and its near relation fear momentarily threaten the rational coping mechanisms that work to quell the terror of violent death. Significantly, "reason" and "the vulgar conception of time" are precisely the concepts symbolically yoked together by Conrad in core intrigue of the novel, the plot to blow up the Greenwich Observatory. After all, the point of the bombing, in the words of Mr. Vladimir, has been "having a go at astronomy" (27). Time throughout the novel is understood as an extension of reason and its categorizing impulse, and here again time is the means by which Heat's mind seeks to structure and overcome his overwhelming sense of suffering and extant "agony."

But reason seems insufficient to the task at hand: A self-reflexive scoff accompanies Heat's exclamatory "Instantaneous!" Not the narrator's, but rather Heat's description, the irony here registers the inadequacy of the characterization, the self-conscious negation of the expression's usefulness. The negation is followed immediately, filled in, as it were, by terrifying reflection; Heat "remembered all he had ever read in popular publications of long terrifying dreams dreamed in the instant of waking; of the whole past lived with frightful

intensity by a drowning man as his doomed head bobs up, streaming, for the last time" (70). Heat exhibits the terror that *The Secret Agent* repeatedly associates with the decision, that is, the fear of anything final or "conclusive." For the introduction of the adjective, "instantaneous" recalls the earlier interchange between Ossipon and the Professor at the Silenus. Like Ossipon and even the Professor, Heat is forced to acknowledge both the mind's palliative impulse and the horror masked by that impulse. No "vulgar" sense of time can allay the affect of what Heat's senses divulge to his consciousness as an immediate form of truth. So while the expression "Instantaneous!" is Heat's narrated thought, the description of the emotional impetus for that expression, "Chief Inspector Heat rose by the force of sympathy, which is a form of fear, above the vulgar conception of time," are the narrator's words describing Heat's feelings of fear and sympathy. By "vulgar" the narrative voice surely intends "common," meaning shared time, as well as "low" in the sense that the common conception of time contends inadequately with the metaphysical horrors that confront him. Conrad acknowledges both the categorizing function of shared, even national time, as well as that categorizing function's inability to stand up against the fragmentary inertias of individual doubt. Heat is overcome by his sense of an alternative truth: "The inexplicable mysteries of conscious existence beset Chief Inspector Heat till he evolved a horrible notion that ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye" (70). Inspector Heat has finally "too much insight" (75).

Just a few pages into Chapter 5, and with this "insight" fresh in his mind, Heat encounters the Professor. Heat's middling position in this important section of narrative situates him perfectly within the social context of the novel: avatar of the middle classes, he is "conscious of having an authorized mission on this earth and the moral support of his

kind (77).[15] Heat's imagined sense of community is critically threatened by the events of his day. His intellectual need for order prohibits him from grasping, from looking too deeply into, what the Assistant Commissioner describes as the "episodic" (112) and seemingly arbitrary "complexion of the case," which had "forced upon him the general absurdity of things human" (73). Heat lacks the "true wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions" (73, 67). He thinks in certainties and with a penchant for orderliness; he is oxymoronically deigned "principal expert in anarchist procedure" (68). Thus Heat's "unphilosophical temperament" is in many ways inadequate to the task of understanding much of what the plot of *The Secret Agent* puts before him, and his encounter with the Professor only makes this the more evident to the reader. The world of normal criminal activity, so to speak, he is able to categorize and fit into a sort of Manichean construction of the world. But, alas, the "exceptional" Professor is not commensurate "with

[15] It is worth noting that the majority of Chapters 5 and 6 consist of a series of interpolations that originate in, or are associated with, the conscious reflection of Inspector Heat upon meeting the Professor just a few pages into Chapter 5. From here the reader is led through an array of no fewer than five narrative segments over two chapters, beginning with the Inspector's shock at meeting the Professor: after Heat runs into the Professor, we flashback first to Heat's initial meeting with the Assistant Commissioner, then to Stevie's postmortem, by which Heat is affected, and which we then understand deeply inflects his meeting with the Professor, to which we return before Heat then continues his journey to meet the Assistant Commissioner for the second time. Thus Heat is a sort of middleman who links the Professor and the Assistant Commissioner. Given that the series of interpolations begins firmly in the memorial reflections of Heat, it is a testament to Conrad's virtuosity that it seems natural rather than jarring for the reader to end up at several points, indeed for nearly all of Chapter 6, experiencing a narrative point of view dominated by the Assistant Commissioner's consciousness, rather than Inspector Heat's, with whom the narrative sequences began. However, the reader does, perhaps, find the jumps in time more startling. In these chapters narrative consciousness seemingly operates through physical association, something like in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, where physical proximity and convergence, association rather than sequence, rules the narrative logic of the novel. In other words, though major reorientations of the narrative also demand major reorientations in time and place (such as between Chapters 3 and 4, 7 and 8, and 8 and 9), generally physical presence rather than sequence conjures thought, which prompts shifts in points of consciousness; from these points, through memorial reflection, occur physical jumps in both space and time.

his idea of the fitness of things" (68). For Heat, the Professor is the physical instantiation of the cosmological disorder he had intimated at the hospital while looking over Stevie's remains.

Avrom Fleishman provides a fascinating reading of the standoff between Heat and the Professor: their "functional arrangement," he writes, is evidence that "on the political level, knowledge is a system of mutual expectations that stabilizes conduct, which might otherwise be precipitate and self-destructive" (192). Perhaps reflecting the cold-war mentality of the time in which he was writing (and that seems to be rapidly returning in our own day), Fleishman describes precisely Carl Schmitt's concept of the political: a state not of peace, but of the perpetual suspension of hostilities between friend and enemy that provide an order and confidence that comes with a shared political understanding: there is "us" and there is "them." The problem with Fleishman's intriguing reading, however, is that for such an "arrangement" to be "functional," it must be both public and avowed. It must be political. In the case of Heat and the Professor, their antipathy is distinctly private and disavowed and thus has no public, political effect. Were it to be brought into the open, it seems, it would only be with a bang. Thus the arrangement bespeaks not stability, but latent violence and an antinomy that is generalized to the most local, individual levels. No community or political significance springs from this arrangement. In this sense, the uneasy detente epitomizes the triumph of private interests that Schmitt and, I think, Conrad both see as the hallmark of possessive individualism and the democratic idea.

Heat's response to the Professor is exemplary of the sort of individualism that develops within an economy of private interests. Heat fears the Professor, who fills him with a desire to live—an aversion to the ultimate abnegation of self-sacrifice—so strong that he becomes physically ill. For this reason, Heat flees the Professor with

> a purposeful briskness of a man disregarding the inclemencies of the weather, but conscious of having an authorized mission on this earth and the moral support of his kind. All the inhabitants of the immense town, the population of the whole country, and even the teeming millions struggling in the planet, were with him—down to the very thieves and mendicant. Yes, the thieves themselves were sure to be with him in his present work. The consciousness of universal support in his general activity heartened him to grapple with the particular problem. (77)

While on a cursory reading one might be tempted to understand Heat's sense of "moral support" here as a form of national identification, instead the "authority" Heat feels lies in the universally recognized draw of individual self-preservation. Heat can thus claim not only the occupants of the town or Island, which could possibly be construed as a national or local feeling, but finally the entirety of the "struggling" planet. Heat imagines the "universal" accord of an environment in which nothing is worth dying for, exhibiting "an individualism," Schmitt writes, "in which [if] any one other than the free individual himself were to decide upon the substance and dimension of his freedom [individualism itself] would be an empty phrase. For the individual as such there is no enemy with whom he must enter into a life and death struggle if he personally does not want to do so."[16]

Thus we see that the Professor's earlier boasts are (in this case) absolutely true; because he "depends on death," his "superiority is evident." Fear besets Heat when faced with the unsubsumable threat of arbitrary violence epitomized by the Professor: "Life had such a strong hold upon him that a fresh wave of nausea broke out in slight perspiration upon his brow" (75). The Professor can thus goad Heat with impunity, mocking the Inspector that "for a man of real convictions this is a fine opportunity for self-sacrifice" (75). The Professor knows he is secure in such an environment because, as he asserts with a

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[16] "An individualism in which any one other than the free individual himself were to decide upon the substance and dimension of his freedom would be an empty phrase. For the individual as such there is no enemy with whom he must enter into a life and death struggle if he personally does not want to do so." Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* 71.

hubris that comes with certain knowledge, "to deal with a man like me you require sheer, naked, inglorious heroism" (53). However Heat is no hero, nor does heroism exist within the pages of *The Secret Agent*. Yet neither is the Professor capable of a decisive act; he is not willing to be the instrument of the change he desires, but like everyone else in the world of *The Secret Agent*, prefers deferral and discussion to action. Instead, the reader gets the parody of a decision that is Stevie's ill-fated "humanitarian enterprise," an effort, if it can be called that, destined to end in negation, in "an enormous hole in the ground under a tree filled with smashed roots and broken branches" (56). Yet, though the Professor regrets that "the sound of exploding bombs was lost in their immensity of passive grains without an echo," the explosion—which is the result not of a decision, but of Stevie tripping over a root—does ultimately have its echo, albeit one that is audible to almost no one, in one decisive act of violence.

Disavowal, or Violence

If society is "essentially criminal," as Conrad described it, then *The Secret Agent* presents a society that is no more criminal than it is instrumental, or perhaps more precisely, a society that is criminally instrumental. *The Secret Agent* is, after all, a novel about a world activated by "the will to use the means" (54). One of the principal means, we see, is disavowal, which lubricates, so to speak, all social operations. By denying themselves the sorts of moral feeling and reflection that could only prove debilitating, Conrad's secret agents secure the material and psychological means to operate in a depraved world in which the commodification of elemental human need creates perverse expressions of value. Thus does Winnie find the fortitude to adhere to her "bargain" with Verloc. Likewise, we are told apologetically that the "poor" cab driver who beats his emaciated horse so ruthlessly does so

"not because his soul was cruel and his heart evil, but because he had to earn his fare" (125). In this sense Conrad's novel conjures a most extreme and indeed cultivated form of that "moral stupidity" that George Eliot famously denigrates in *Middlemarch*.[17] For characters like the cab driver, like Winnie Verloc, and like Winnie's mother are all well aware of the means that allow them to seek their ends: they simply choose not to acknowledge the moral significance of the world of which their actions form a part. Thus we are told repeatedly something to the effect that, Winnie "felt profoundly that things didn't stand much looking into" (141).

However disavowal functions not merely as a way around moral compunction in *The Secret Agent*, but also as a crucial means of avoiding the violence latent within the human animal itself. For to register feelings sympathetically, to be susceptible to compassion, is ultimately to risk the fate of Stevie, who "felt with great completeness and some profundity" the suffering of those around him (136). Appropriate to the moral economy of the novel, Stevie's moral sensibility, rather than being redemptive, instead proves destructive. Disavowal is the cognitive means by which the agent refutes the pathos and pressing violence of the environment; in a world where sympathy equates to hatred and violence, this refusal to feel prevents the agent from turning destructive—as both Stevie and Winnie ultimately do. There is simply no room for moral sensitivity in the violently instrumentalized world of *The Secret Agent*. Disavowal does not merely produce a false equanimity in *The Secret Agent*, but rather induces and secures the only attainable order for both person and polity. Conrad shows that disavowal as a defense mechanism has evolved, as it were, and given rise to a human sensibility that is negatively adapted in its capacity for fellowship and affiliation. Conrad's vision of liberal society is not a vision of human relations that have regressed back

[17] See Eliot, *Middlemarch* 211.

into a state of nature, as the Professor would hope; it is not "might" that is of chief importance in the world of *The Secret Agent* (of course neither is "right," by any stretch of the imagination, of principal significance). What matters most is will, the psychological strength to commit oneself to an alternate epistemology, an epistemology of secrecy and disavowal, and by doing so negate the pathetic world Stevie describes so eloquently as "Bad! Bad!" (133).

After the somewhat dizzying narrative leap forward in Chapters 5-7, Chapter 8 unexpectedly returns the reader to the period prior to the failed bombing, and Stevie's unfortunate demise.[18] The chapter is crucial in a number of ways and accounts for some of Conrad's most pointed commentary on English society, but also provides the most overt examples of disavowal in the novel. The chapter begins by divulging Winnie's mother's private motivations for orchestrating her move to an almshouse "founded by a wealthy innkeeper for the destitute widows" of "victuallers," which she has managed only after "persistent importunities" (120). These importunities depend on the lie that she has been forced out of Verloc's home by her own daughter; "in this case she was sacrificing Winnie…to the opinion of people that she [Winnie] would never see and who would never see her" (128). We see that her efforts are driven by a selfless, if perforce deformed, desire to do what is best for her children; she leaves Brett Street in order to ensure that room remains in Verloc's abode for the "destitute" and "peculiar" Stevie (123). Again,

[18] As Jakob Lothe describes in his excellent breakdown of narrative method in *The Secret Agent* in *Conrad's Narrative Method*, the effect of the novel's narrative shifts on the reader is impossible to recreate upon secondary readings. Indeed, one finds it difficult to remember that, as of Chapter 8 in the novel, and after three chapters specifically treating the aftermath of the bomb blast, the narrative has still not divulged the identity of the exploded bomber. Conversely, as Lothe also notes correctly, *The Secret Agent* is a book, as we find only upon rereading, which is crammed with proleptic markers that are impossible to make sense of on first reading the novel.

commensurate with the moral economy of *The Secret Agent*, and the narrator's ironic ambivalences, the reader senses a certain earnestness in the narrator's appraisal of Mrs. Verloc's mother's "heroism and unscrupulousness" (128). There is no end in *The Secret Agent*, however noble, that in its pursuit does not seem to require some ignoble action, and the "will to use the means"; thus her "end, conceived in the astuteness of an uneasy heart, the old woman had pursued with secrecy and determination" (121). For we find that Winnie's mother's "heroic" act has ultimately necessitated the "sacrifice" of her daughter to public opinion on the one hand and the "abandonment" of her son Stevie on the other.

Her "object attained in astute secrecy, the heroic old woman" then makes "a clean breast of it to Mrs. Verloc" (121). But in fact she does no such thing; Mrs. Verloc's mother only relates to her daughter what is unavoidably and publicly apparent: the fact that she is moving. What she has done to secure the move, and why she has done it, she does not say. Nor "does she allow her inward apprehensions to rob her of the advantage of the venerable placidity of her outward person" (121). Nonetheless, the surprise of her sudden move is such that Winnie cannot help but inquire about it:

> 'Whatever did you want to do that for?' she exclaimed, in scandalized astonishment. The shock must have been severe to make her depart from that distant and uninquiring acceptance of facts which was her force and her safeguard in life.
> 'Weren't you made comfortable enough here?'
> She had lapsed into these inquiries, but next moment she saved the consistency of her conduct by resuming her dusting, whlie the old woman sat scared and dumb under her dingy white cap and lusterless dark wig.
> 'How in the world did you manage it, mother?'
> As not affecting the inwardness of things, which it was Mrs. Verloc's principle to ignore, this curiosity was excusable. It bore merely on the methods. The old woman welcomed it eagerly as bringing forward something that could be talked about with much sincerity. (121-122)

Mrs. Verloc welcomes the opportunity to speak with "sincerity," precisely because in doing so she can refuse to divulge anything substantive to Winnie. This clearly suits Winnie, who meets her mother's "exhaustive answer" with a "mansuetude" much appreciated by her

mother. It is worth noting here, how with "mansuetude" (a word which without question escapes the idiom of Winnie's mother) Conrad alerts the reader to the ever-present consciousness of the novel's narrative voice. The narrator's ambivalent—and indecisive—appraisal of Winnie's mother's "heroism and unscrupulousness" is exemplary of just how complex the moral judgments are in the world of the novel, and also how sincere, for once, was Conrad's description of his artistic approach in the 1920 "Author's Note" to the novel as always oscillating between "pity and scorn."

The opening of Chapter 8 gives the reader a renewed sense of not only the insincerity that presides over human intercourse in *The Secret Agent*, but also the sorts of strain that accompany the hollowness of discourse (having seven years experience at such surreptitious dealings, Winnie seems more accustomed to, and secure in, the disingenuous life in which she engages). As the chapter moves out into the public (and for once in the novel not deserted) streets of London, the difficulty of maintaining the divide between order and truth becomes acute, and we see that even as disavowal creates and maintains divisions in the novel (between private and public, and truth and order, for example), this sort of secrecy also joins and preserves: at moments the defense mechanism of disavowal seems to be the only thing holding things together in *The Secret Agent*. The difficulty of maintaining divisions is communicated as a sense of strain and discord permeating the narrative, inflecting both the tone and rhetoric of the chapter. Chapter 8 is famous for its presentation of the carriage ride through the streets of London as Stevie and Mrs. Verloc escort their mother to the almshouse, in particular for how the cabman's violently instrumental treatment of his horse emblematizes the "moral nihilism" of *The Secret Agent*. Winnie's unsympathetic manner (she flatly observes "This isn't a very good horse" at the same moment that Stevie veritably writhes in his growing discomfort) allies her with the cabman.

Conversely Mrs. Verloc's mother, like Stevie, slowly becomes overwhelmed as the cab moves painfully toward its end. The cab ride is a horribly comedic parody of human relations. Reproducing the difficulty of producing shared meaning—one of the novel's central concerns—the women compete with the deafening din of the carriage, screaming ridiculously at one another their sentiments regarding parting and the care of Winnie's charge, Stevie.

With a sympathetic faculty raw and congenitally unprotected, Stevie cannot withstand his exposure to the brutality he witnesses in the public world, "and the horror of one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other—at the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home" (136). As his habit of drawing "innumerable circles"—"a confusion of intersecting lines suggest[ing] a rendering of cosmic chaos"—indicates, Stevie's inability to internally contend with confusion and disorder results in its more or less immediate external manifestation (36). Consequently we see that the "violence and pathos" associated with the "dramas of fallen horses" "induced him to sometimes shriek piercingly in the crowd, which disliked to be disturbed by sounds of distress in its quiet enjoyment of the national spectacle" (7). Though the violence of his upbringing (like the Professor, Stevie too is a product of the novel's "inorganic nature") apparently renders Stevie acutely sympathetic to anybody or anything that cannot protect itself, he evidently also lacks the cognitive ability to ignore or disavow what should be painful to him only at a remove. Stevie has no defense mechanism, and thus cannot handle the open secrets to which he is made privy by Winnie. Stevie's extreme sensitivity translates immediately into violence: "In the face of anything which affected directly or indirectly his morbid dread of pain, Stevie ended by turning vicious" (134).

> The tenderness of his universal charity had two phases as indissolubly joined and connected as the reverse and obverse sides of a medal. The anguish of immoderate

> compassion was succeeded by the pain of an innocent but pitiless rage. Those two states expressing themselves outwardly by the same signs of futile bodily agitation, his sister Winnie soothed his excitement without ever fathoming its twofold character. Mrs. Verloc wasted no portion of this transient life in seeking for fundamental information. This is a sort of economy having all the appearances and some of the advantages of prudence. Obviously it may be good for one not to know too much. And such a view accords very well with constitutional indolence. (135)

The explicit link made here between compassionate feeling and violent outrage is an essential one in the novel. Stevie epitomizes the latent violence of "humanitarian enterprise" (211), that is, of "two states expressing themselves outwardly by the same signs." Everywhere the reader turns, the novel reproduces structurally Schmitt's chilling words concerning the political appropriation of concept of humanity: "To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term has incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven by the most extreme inhumanity" (*Concept of the Political* 54). By this point in his career, in works like *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad had shown his understanding of this concept's application concerning the practices of imperialism. Yet, in *The Secret Agent* he demonstrates the relevance of these unsettling ideas to European political culture and the "universal charity" of the cosmopolitan impulse.

The central impetus behind both the Professor's philosophy and Vladimir's plotting in *The Secret Agent* is the instrumental application of violence to incite compassion, national sentiment, and then retribution—to break through the stolid indolence of the middle classes and by doing so render violence a justifiable response based on compassion—so that England will no longer lag. Both men epitomize Schmitt's dictum, which holds that "whoever invokes humanity wants to cheat." (*Concept of the Political* 54). The Professor hopes to "make people believe" that he "ought to be shot at sight like a dog." He wishes to induce a state of emergency in which a portion of humanity—himself—is deprived of the "quality

of being human." Mr. Vladimir, on the other hand, seeks a final resolution for what he describes as England's parliamentary emphasis on "prevention" (21). "There is no end to prevention," Vladimir tells Verloc, and thus no end to deferral and discussion. Because "they dislike finality in this country," Vladimir desires a "cure"; through the execution of an "outrage," he seeks to influence public opinion precisely in order to shift the social and political inertia towards inducing decisive action (21). He attempts to do so by creating, through violent provocation, a state of emergency, and thus of political reaction, because "deliberations"—that catch phrase of liberal procedure—"deliberations upon international action for the suppression of political don't seem to get anywhere" (23). Vladimir identifies, and tries to correct through nefarious means, a central dilemma of liberalism, that is, that deliberation tends merely to engender indecisiveness and inevitably results in that general torpor that is a central theme of the novel. He locates the source of that dilemma England's "sentimental regard for individual liberty" (23). For this reason, "England lags" (23).[19]

But as Vladimir knows, provoking the state of exception will indeed require something exceptional, an "outrage" that is itself inexplicable, to penetrate the ersatz equanimity of the masses. Paradoxically, by having "a go at astronomy," Vladimir—whose ultimate aim is to induce a more strict, less liberal order—seeks to reduce social organization to degree zero, so to speak, by symbolically annihilating modernity's fundamental

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[19] Given Conrad's own feelings regarding liberal democracy, Vladimir is an intriguing character. For one finally wonders, despite the novel's obvious aversion to Mr. Vladimir, if Conrad does not in the end essentially agree with Vladimir's appraisal of England's deleterious "individualism." The novel seems to sanction Vladimir's criticisms, yet deride Vladimir's solutions. Intriguingly, like Vladimir, Conrad was of course also "descended from generations victimized by the instruments of an arbitrary power." One cannot help but wonder about this statement's paradoxical significance—for it seems Vladimir wishes to repeat the sins of his oppressors—and whether this is in some way a self-reflexive statement of Conrad's own indecision and Conrad's own politics.

convention: time. The Foreign Ambassador wants to universalize that cosmic sense of anarchy, that "sympathy as a form of fear," which Inspector Heat had felt so acutely standing before the fragments of Stevie's annihilated body. For Vladimir such an attack alone would be truly decisive: The "absurd ferocity" of blowing up the meridian "will affect [the masses] more profoundly than the mangling of a whole street—or theatre—full of their own kind" (27). Thus Vladimir's plotting once again mirrors the grim desires of the Professor, who "dreamt of a world like a shambles" (240). "Exterminate! Exterminate!" proclaims the anarchist, "that is the only way to progress" (240). Yet it is finally the negative force of *The Secret Agent* itself that produces a degree zero as its plots and characters cancel themselves out, so to speak, by their irresolution and indecision.

That is, except for Winnie, who will finally negate herself as well as Verloc in a decisive act of violence. For though the Greenwich bombing makes not a scratch on the veneer of public opinion, it echoes with savage violence through Verloc's private "domestic happiness." Verloc's desperation combines with Stevie's "immoderate compassion" and "pitiless rage" to begin a chain of events that culminates—hardly decisively—in Stevie being "blown to fragments in a state of innocence and in the conviction of being engaged in a humanitarian enterprise" (211). The bombing does indeed fail to register among the cosmopolitan population, a fact due precisely to the phenomenal scale of the democratic "illusion which imposes due to its size alone." Though the violent echoes are diffused and made unrecognizable among the passive immensity of humanity, they ultimately have a seismic impact on Winnie Verloc.

> This creature, whose moral nature had been subjected to a shock of which, in the physical order, the most violent earthquake of history could only be a faint and languid rendering, was at the mercy of trifles, of casual contacts. (202)

Winnie, whose philosophy of disavowal had maintained a surface composure impenetrable

to all stimuli, is made by the truth of her brother's murder psychologically and emotionally raw, at the "mercy of trifles." True to the calculus of Conrad's novel, the equation of compassion and violence repeats itself once again. Vladimir's plotting has in fact induced a state of emergency, but one silently confined to the Verloc household. Significantly, Winnie's decisive move, prior to actually killing Verloc, is to refashion his identity as an abstraction, remote from affiliation, and then ultimately to dehumanize him entirely. Verloc becomes "the man who had taken Stevie out from under her eyes to murder him in a locality whose name was at the moment not present to her memory" (203). He is then seen as "a monster," a "reflective beast, not very dangerous—a slow beast with a sleek head, gloomier than a seal, and with a husky voice" (204). And it is this "famous" "husky voice" that undoes Verloc (19). By emitting the verbal echo of "Greenwich Park," he triggers the metonymic detonation that fills "the empty place in [Winnie's] memory" with violent images expanding "pictorially" in her mind: "A park—smashed branches, torn leaves, gravel, bits of brotherly flesh and bone, all spouting up together in the manner of a firework" (206). These violently visual echoes produce a psychological state of exception that engenders yet more violence in Winnie's murder of Verloc.

Commensurate with the logic of the novel, the significance of this one decisive act is hollowed out by the vagaries of time. Time's relativizing power (another problem of scale) seems capable of rendering any act meaningless (except, for Mr. Verloc of course, who, finally seeing the writing on the wall, so to speak, registers the full significance of the moment as it pertains to directly him). The plodding temporal progression of the chapter that contains the murder scene, and the slow motion process of Verloc's murder itself, are both "leisurely enough" for many things, but "not leisurely enough to allow Mr. Verloc to move either hand or foot" (208). Like at all points in the novel, there is time to think, even

plan, but somehow never time for thinking or planning to issue as action. This is another version of Heat's earlier intimation that "ages of atrocious pain and mental torture could be contained between two successive winks of an eye" (70). For there is nothing "swift as a flash of lightning" about the way Verloc registers the imminence of his death. Indeed, as a blind act of revenge, the act is conclusive. Yet Verloc's death concludes nothing, and certainly provides no resolution for either Winnie or the novel more generally. The death resists the novel's own eschatology, delivering Winnie into a "freedom" that is in fact a state of profound indeterminacy, one which she resolves, after a manner, by contracting yet another bargain—this time with Ossipon.

For in fact, Winnie hardly seems agent to the act of murder: "The knife was already planted in his breast. It met no resistance on its way. Hazard has such accuracies" (208). We have always know that this knife was going to find its way into Verloc sooner or later, and the "leisurely" manner in which it does so only serves to parody the final act of resolution that put it there; Winnie is merely instrument, not agent. For it is history, or nature—or Conrad, for in the novel there is surely no difference—that acts finally as the agent of death, wherein "the ultimate design surpasses and even perverts the planning of man."[20] The act itself is enveloped and muted by the expanse of time that surrounds it: as an echo, it becomes less and less audible, not subsumed but replaced by the sound of Verloc's running blood, which impacts the floor "with a sound of ticking growing fast and furious like the pulse of an insane clock" (210). In the end, time seems to be the one democratically applicable truth of *The Secret Agent*, not a "vulgar conception of time," but rather a violent expanse that is precisely antithetical to order. For Carl Schmitt the purpose of the exception is to produce both order and meaning—the two are essentially inextricable for Schmitt—and

[20] Löwith, *Meaning in History* 56.

in doing so, to orientate a negative anthropology toward its possible redemption in the concept of the political. However, as we see in *The Secret Agent*, Conrad is deeply ambivalent about this type of theological narrative. Still, Conrad's novel demonstrates that, like the imperceptible rend left in the unfathomable waters of the Channel as Winnie's body passes through it, whatever significance may inhere in the diffuse actions of a liberal society, meaning is "destined" to remain "impenetrable," like those "acts of madness and despair" that characterize *The Secret Agent*, as they too are swallowed up by the "damned hole [of] eternity" (245, 241).

CONCLUSION

Hayden White has suggested that "historicality as a distinct mode of human existence is unthinkable without the presupposition of a system of law in relation to which a specifically legal subject could be constituted," and thus that "historical self-consciousness, the kind of consciousness capable of imagining the need to represent reality as a history, is conceivable only in terms of its interest in law, legality, and legitimacy" (*Content of the Form* 14). The "intimate relationship between law, historicality, and narrativity," continues White, "raises the suspicion that narrative in general, from the folktale to the novel, from the annals to the fully realized 'history,' has to do with the topics of law, legality, legitimacy, or, more generally, authority" (*The Content of the Form* 13). This strikes me as certainly being true of the novel. For although the novel is about many other things than legality, it does indeed assume a dialectical relationship between a system of law or legitimacy and a subject that cannot act independently of that regime of authority. In the broadest sense, the paradigm of legitimacy that organizes the self-consciousness of the subject in the nineteenth century can only be described as liberal or, in other words, as a legal and ethical regime concerned chiefly with the rights of the individual as opposed to the controls of a centralized state power. The world of the nineteenth-century novel is the world of the individual subject and of a civil society composed by individual subjects.

Hence the nineteenth-century novel is the domain not of heroes, but rather of normal people, so to speak, who take the place of heroes. In this respect White is correct to name Hegel as "the historical conscience of the age that followed him" (*Metahistory* 135).

For after Hegel there is no person or action that is insignificant to history; each person or action may be merely instrumental in Hegel's vision of historical progression, but each also gains world-historical significance. It is for this reason that in *Adam Bede* Eliot lingers over "Dutch paintings" with a "delicious sympathy"; the "old woman" in her "mob cap" with her "monotonous homely existence" is no less important to her account of history than are the "world-stirring" actions of Napoleon or Theresa (*Adam Bede* 195). This new importance of the subject is also why the individual's internal needs and longings suddenly become the appropriate content of the novel. The subject's dissatisfaction with what is, which derives from his sense of longing for what ought to be, emerges as energy able to activate the novel as a form. Thus there exists always, according to Lukács, the dissonance of incommensurability in the novel, which is produced, "by the refusal of the immanence of being to enter into empirical life" (*Theory* 71).

For this reason *Middlemarch* is the story of Dorothea and not St. Theresa. Theresa had found her "epos in the founding of a religious order"; she was able to apply to an unimpeachable and given metaphysical ordering of the world, which was adequate to her needs as an individual being. Yet, sadly, the "medium in which [Theresa's] ardent deeds took shape is gone for ever" (*Middlemarch* 838). Unfortunately for Dorothea, *Middlemarch's* contemporary "medium" was "helped by no coherent social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge for the ardently willing soul" (3). For Eliot "faith," "order," and "knowledge" are the essentially related elements capable of producing meanings that bond the individual with something other than itself; understanding that "performs the function of knowledge" is as important as knowledge itself (if in the end there is any difference at all). In the case of Theresa, all these elements had been supplied by religious understanding, but for Dorothea they are not supplied at all and must instead be

produced by the self—which is finally inadequate to the task. In a similar manner, the novels of Thomas Hardy give evidence of a neutralized social and political environment, in which epistemological insecurities, and the absence of the given in the world, lead to error and human suffering. In the same way that Dorothea and Tess are interstitial figures, these novels present interstitial worlds, domains that have lost one organizing "faith" and thus seek another, which is found, problematically, in the ambiguous abstraction of humanity itself. In the individual's ambivalent stance toward authority (in White's sense of the term), which results from her conflicting desires for both freedom and order, we can see precisely the reflection of the liberal paradigm that provides order to the world of the novel.

The longing that is the consequence of what Lukács calls the "refusal of the immanence of being" propels the novel forward; this "refusal" is also what makes the novel essentially romantic. Subjected by his own delusions of absolute autonomy, according to Carl Schmitt, the "romantic could not find the reality he sought in himself, the community, the development of world history, or—as long as he remained romantic—in the God of traditional metaphysics [nonetheless] the longing for reality demanded fulfillment. With the help of irony he could protect himself against the sole reality" (*Political Romanticism* 73). (By "sole reality," Schmitt intends here what is present, immediately, to the subject.) As the rhetorical figure of doubt, irony deflects the romantic subject's disappointment in what is apparent so that "every historical moment is an elastic point in the vast philosophy with which we dispose over peoples and eons" (74). The romantic subject can always begin again, so to speak, and thus there is a temporal function to his ironic deflection: "reality is punctuated, and every point becomes the beginning point of a novel" (74).

We recognize this individual from the English novel, where the romantic figure presents for the reader certain ontological and epistemological ambivalences. Exemplary

here would be Dickens's Steerforth, Eliot's Will Ladislaw, Hardy's Angel Clare, or Conrad's Martin Decoud, whose "first moral sentiment" of his life is forced upon him by a "solitude so severe that it left him doubting "his own individuality" (*Nostromo* 393). Decoud's first (and last!) moral feeling is, significantly, negative, just one more bout of questioning and doubt. Decoud's nihilism is an extreme example of the romantic sensibility, perhaps, but the moral anarchy of Decoud's position points to the total absence of meaning that is precisely Schmitt's complaint. And this is the point: from the absolute standpoint of the romantic individual, nothing is connected in its meaning (except to the individual himself), and thus from Schmitt's position any "legal or moral judgment would be incongruous" with the romantic standpoint" because "every norm would seem to be an anti-romantic tyranny" (*Political Romanticism* 124). A decentralized civil society composed of romantic individuals necessarily means a society shot through with divergent interests and burgeoning antipathies. When this romantic sensibility permeates the realm of the political, the result is the sort of parliamentary indecisiveness that, for Schmitt, characterizes liberalism. For Schmitt, romanticism and liberalism are concomitant, and political romanticism is the fulfillment of liberalism. The romantic individual, which is a sort of mythic instantiation of liberal bourgeois individualism, is both symptom and cause of the types of modern intransigence Schmitt believed was intrinsic to the depoliticized world of liberal society, and which a novel like Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, as we have seen, makes its subject.

From this perspective the novel of the individual personality is also necessarily the novel of the depoliticized world, a world of deferrals and endless discussions, and in which indecision constitutes a political ethos. I have tried to trace in the preceding pages some of the ways this sort of indecision manifests itself as a salient feature of Victorian narrative. I have also demonstrated that indecision and incommensurability demand violence as a means

of resolution. Because the problem of authority is, well, a problem of the novel, the political and legal thought of Carl Schmitt has, I believe, provided an appropriate and also a new (at least to the discussion of the novel) idiom in which to ground my examination of Victorian novels. Schmitt is particularly relevant, I believe, because those nontrivial insecurities and conflicts regarding meaning and authority, as the novel presents them, seem to always already prefigure the need for a decision. So even if we value Schmitt's trenchant critiques of liberal democracy, we likely revile his solutions to the problems he exposes; but if we revile his solutions, we ought to perhaps evaluate in a more reflexive fashion those procedures in which we put our faith. And this, I believe, is what the novels I have examined in this study ask us to do. As we saw in *Adam Bede*, the jury can "deliberate" all they want, but finally a "decision" must be made. Not only is that decision apt to be exclusionary or violent, but it can also only be legitimized through recourse to the sacred, a sort of purity that exists at a completely unsubsumable remove from the legal sphere. In this case, liberal procedure, Eliot seems to argue, cannot escape its theological underpinnings. Moreover, legitimacy is determined from outside of the domain in which legitimacy exists as a feature of normative life. In other words, the rule requires the exception. Or, yet another way of putting this paradox is to say that rule requires another, alternate set of rules.

If this sounds extraordinary, well, that is the point. We need only think of two examples from our contemporary world to illustrate again the function of the exception in political procedure. First, the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, which exists and functions outside of the Geneva Conventions and also (at least until quite recently) entirely outside of United Stated legal jurisdiction: here is a paradigmatic example of inhumanities perpetrated in the name of humanity, a central contradiction of liberalism that has been a core concern of the novelists examined in this study. By simply applying a term like "terrorist," or "illegal

combatant," to a human being, we are able to deprive him of his humanity, and in doing so, in one stroke authorize the most inhumane of treatments. And second, the Foreign Intelligence Security Acts Court, or FISA Court, which exists *ex parte* and is thus excepted from the procedures established by public and judicial oversight. Here is an instance *par excellence* of crypto-decisionism; the arbitrary decision is the norm, which stands behind the norms of liberal proceduralism and the "force of the best argument." The ethical implications of these practices are officially disavowed yet the way that these hardly veiled states of exception (exceptions that have become the rule) exist in our own lives is exemplary of disavowal in only a weak, purely formal way (a fact that is at once interesting and disturbing). However, for the liberal mind of the nineteenth century, or so I have argued, the failure of the very authority in relation to which the subject and his agency are constituted produces profound cognitive disturbances. Even more disturbing would be the open acknowledgement of these failures. Thus, troubling truths must be disavowed and open secrets maintained. Yet, as this study has shown, these disturbances are nonetheless registered mimetically in Victorian narrative.

To return to Hayden White, he writes that "where there is an ambiguity or ambivalence regarding the status of the legal system, which is the form in which the subject encounters most immediately the social system in which he is enjoined to achieve full humanity, the ground on which any closure of a story one might wish to tell about a past is lacking" (*The Content of the Form* 14). For this reason, according to White, historical representation in the nineteenth century forced the formal coherencies of narrative, as a sort of cultural wish fulfillment, on the events it re-presented. The demand for closure and forced order became an answer to the demand for moral meaning in historical narrative (*Content of the Form* 21). White argues that, increasingly, historical representation became

susceptible to the "progressive demotion of the sublime in favor of the beautiful as a solution to the problems of taste and imagination" (*The Content of the Form* 68). Historical narrative then becomes aestheticized, according to White, and is as such committed to the suppression, or negation, of what Schiller called "the uncertain anarchy of the moral world," which White equates to the historical sublime (*The Content of the Form* 67-70). For White, Hegel's philosophy of history is exemplary of this phenomenon of aestheticization.[1] From White's perspective, Hegel's historical narrative "is a prime example of a certain kind of 'politics of interpretation' that produces an 'interpretation of politics with ideological implications" (*The Content of the Form* 70). "The sublimity of the spectacle of history had to be transcended if it was to serve as an object of knowledge and deprived of the terror it induced as 'a panorama of sin and suffering'" (*The Content of the Form* 70). This sort of philosophy of history is dangerous precisely because it "imputes a meaning to history that renders its manifest confusion comprehensible…and in doing so, deprive[s] history of the kind of meaninglessness that alone can goad living human beings to make their lives different for themselves and their children" (*The Content of the Form* 72).

It is worth noting that the process White describes here corresponds almost precisely to the function of what Carl Schmitt called the "historical demiurge," or the process by which historical narrative enfolds into its progressive order the violent discontinuities of history that would otherwise appear chaotic. For Schmitt, this is comparable to the function of irony as a means of deflecting the immediate truth of reality for the romantic; in this case, narativizing becomes a means of forgetting, or deflecting, the truth of the historical past. Schmitt does not mention Hegel by name, but, like White, he obviously sees Hegel as exemplary here: "What exists is rational because it is the work of the world spirit that

[1] See White, *The Content of the Form* 59-74; see also, White, *Metahistory* 100-112.

produces itself historically. What history has done is done well" (*Political Romanticism* 62). According to Schmitt, Hegel, it would seem, does not make a decision, but by the perspectival slight of hand open to narrative, accommodates both truth and order, or rather obscures truth by the imposition of the coherent emplottments made available by narrative. Hegel syncretizes precisely those conflicting energies of narrative that, as I have argued above, novelists like Eliot, Hardy, and Conrad strive to pull back apart in their novels. In a novel like *Nostromo*, for example, Conrad will indict precisely historical narrative's tendency to exclude or subsume competing histories. And though White postulates that historical narrative's *raison d'être* is to "moralize reality," I have tried to show in all the novels examined in this dissertation that they have a stake in "de-sublimating" the novel as a from of historical, and thus, political narrative (*The Content as Form* 14). Victorian narrative works instead to make the reader aware of "reality's" reliance not only on violence, but also disavowal.

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